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To

My Brother

A. EUGENE WATSON, U. S. N.

"ON TO MEXICO!"

With CORTES the CONQUEROR

By

Virginia Watson

With
Illustrations & Decorations by
Frank E. Schoonover

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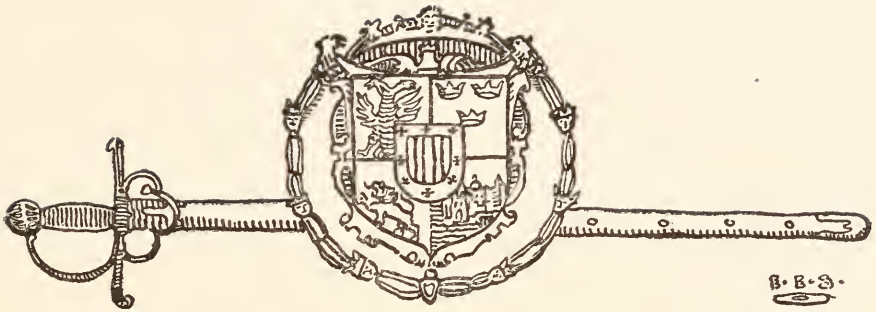
With Cortes the Conqueror



INTRODUCTION

The conquest of Mexico in the sixteenth century is one of the greatest true fairytales of the world. A handful of men, lured by rumors they had heard of a land where gold was as plentiful as rocks in their Spain, set forth to discover and conquer it, with small conception of the greatness of their undertaking. They found a country abounding in marvels, riches and dangers. By means of audacity, courage and gunpowder they made themselves masters of its monarch and of its people, gave a new realm to the King of Spain, a wider sheepfold to Christendom, and started the vast flood of western gold that for generations continued to pour into Europe's hungry coffers. In all American history there is no story so colorful as the story of the *Conquistadores* and the contest between their valor and the desperate defence of the Aztecs. There is no need to turn to European annals in search of romance. And, just now when we of the northern Republic are endeavoring to understand the character and the needs of the Mexican people, in which the Aztec element is still one of the

largest, this story may take on an added value due to the light it throws upon Mexico's past.

The three different races who played the most prominent parts in the exploration of the New World — the English, the French, the Spanish—were actuated to a certain extent by the same motives. They sought for fortune, adventure, liberty and the chance to convert the heathen; but they differed in the degree by which these motives affected them. The Spaniards above all desired gold and what they believed was the saving from hell of thousands of unbaptized souls. Cortes's zeal to convert Montezuma and his people was undoubtedly as sincere as his eagerness for Montezuma's treasure.

Hernando Cortes must be numbered among the great conquerors of the world. His "army," if judged by its size in comparison to what it was to achieve, would have been scoffed at by Alexander, Cæsar or Napoleon. But these soldiers would have hailed the Spaniard as one of them, for his intrepidity, his resourcefulness, his skill in handling men, his quickness in forcing an issue, and for his relentlessness. It was a cruel age; but Cortes, though there are deeds in his life which may not be condoned, was less cruel than many of his contemporaries, and was never cruel from mere wantonness. He was the true soldier who would suffer when his men suffered; he inspired them to deeds which seemed almost beyond the strength of men, and to personal loyalty to their leader, though many had first been his bitter foes.

It is possible, as certain historians subsequent to Prescott, such as Morgan and Bandelier, would have us believe, that Mexico at the time of the Conquest was not the land of won-

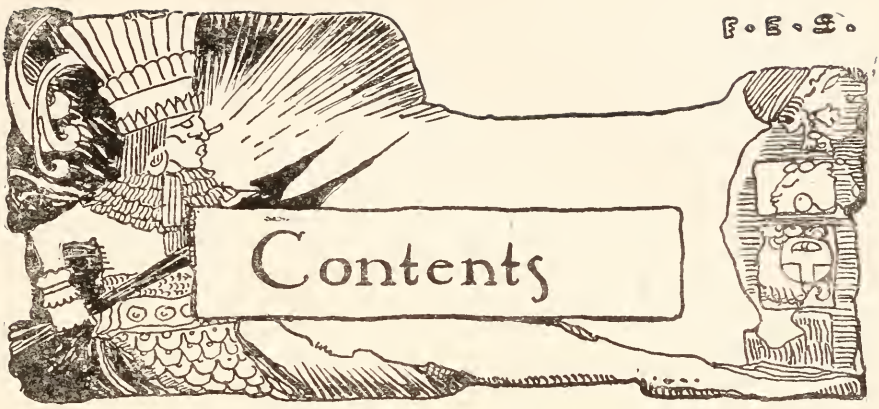
der, beauty, riches and ordered government that Cortes, Bernal Diaz, Sahagun, Ixtlilxochitl, and other early historians have described it, that the eager imagination of the Conquerors made them ready to see marvels where there were none, and that they and later writers misrepresented facts and institutions for lack of understanding of their real meaning. Nevertheless, even if we concede a certain overcoloring due to enthusiasm or ignorance, there are still many facts of the beauty and size of the Mexican cities, of the warlike temper of the people, of the magnificence of religious and royal buildings, of the wise husbandry of the populace, which can be proved by remaining monuments, jewelry, pottery and the codices of ancient picture-writing that testify to a civilization of an advanced order. The contrast between it and the civilization of the *Conquistadores* is as wide and even more picturesque than that between the Spanish conquerors of Granada and the Moors whom they banished from Europe less than twenty years before.

I have followed closely Prescott's wonderful history, "The Conquest of Mexico," for the sequence of historical events. Cortes's own letters to Charles V and portions of Bernal Diaz's history have helped make clear in my mind the picture I have tried to make clear for others of the great soldier. Montezuma, Alvarado, Sandoval, Guatemozin, Father Olmedo, these and others are alive for ever in the story of the Conquest, and in many places throughout this book I have used the exact words attributed to them by contemporaneous chroniclers. Fernando and Ahuitzotl and other minor characters and most of the incidents owe their origin to my own fancy.

INTRODUCTION

Years ago in a picturesque old hunting castle in Europe I was shown some capes of brilliant color and soft texture. "These are Aztec feather mantles," I was told. "They were sent by Cortes to Emperor Charles V, from Mexico, a part of the treasure that astounded the Spanish court." The sight of these exotic garments quickened in my imagination an interest for that strange race and its tragic history which has never lessened.

Those readers who desire to learn of what the future brought to Cortes and Guatemozin may find the facts in the pages of Prescott or other historians.



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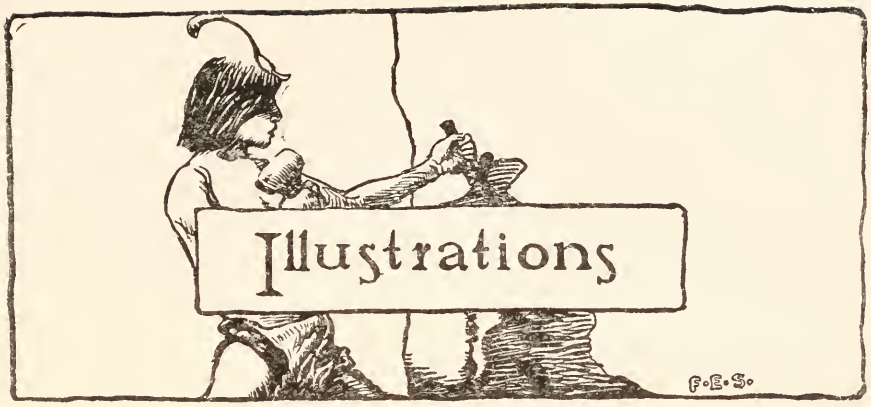

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"On to Mexico!" . . . . . *Frontispiece*

The knife struck 16

The eyes of the Europeans glistened 56

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He was not spared 107

"Behold the statue of the god!" 148

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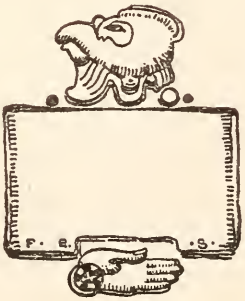


WITH CORTES THE CONQUEROR

CHAPTER I

The Landing of the Spaniards

THE wind blew direct from the southeast, filling out the sails of the eleven ships, barks, caravels and open brigantines. Their decks were crowded with seamen and soldiers, whose eagerness to reach the goal found even their goodly speed too slow. In the waists of the caravels stood the horses balancing unsteadily in their improvised stalls and neighing nervously when an exceptionally heavy wave pounded against the sides.

From the mastheads of the eleven ships floated the royal standard of Spain with its Lions of Aragon and the Castles of Castile. Against the distant horizon those on the port side of the vessels beheld a blurred line. Whenever the breeze died down for an instant the heat of the tropical sun was scarcely to be borne, and men threw themselves panting on the deck,

only to spring to their feet when a new gust of wind sent the ships flying westward.

On the foremost and largest of the vessels stood the chief pilot, Antonio de Alaminos, greyhaired and greybearded, to whose Spanish eyes the Spanish Main had become more familiar than even the Bay of Biscay.

"How soon, Captain?" asked of him a dark-eyed man above the middle height.

"In an hour or so now, Señor, if the wind holds out," answered the pilot. "As you know, I have never sailed here before, but I do not believe from what I learned at Cozumel that there are any shoals or hidden rocks to delay or endanger us. But I put more faith in yonder line"—and he pointed to two sailors who were heaving the lead—"than I do in Indian words."

"You have had many years in which to test them both, in truth," suggested the Commander.

"Since the day I piloted the Great Admiral," answered the pilot proudly, "since I found the way for Christopher Columbus when he sailed on his last voyage in the Indies."

"What was he like? Tell me, good Antonio," asked the Commander eagerly. "It was never my fortune to behold him, though I mind me well how I listened as a lad with beating heart in my birthplace in Estremadura to the wonderful news that spread throughout Spain when he returned from his first voyage."

"I cannot picture him for others," and the pilot shook his head; "but I see him ever in my mind's eye. Only," and he looked up at the Commander as if to verify an impression that

had just come to him, "there is a look in your eye and a tone in your voice, Señor Cortes, which might have been his."

"A good omen, Antonio," and Cortes smiled; "may the saints grant that it means a new world for me also to discover."

The Commander, whose impatience made him restless, walked aft, and a priest strolling forward, took his place by the pilot.

"Before sundown, you say?" he repeated, "before sundown we may plant the blessed Cross on yon heathen shore? Truly am I blessed that I should live to see this."

Both men stood apparently lost in thought, though the trained vision of the mariner made him aware of every difference in the blue waters. His mind revolved the question which he finally put into words:

"How can it be, Father, that men tell such tales of Señor Cortes? In truth he seems to me fit timber for a great leader."

The priest, bringing back his fancies from the horizon where already he beheld a land of baptised converts, answered:

"Did you ever hear the story, friend Antonio, of how the blessed St. Paul was once a sinner and the foe of all Christians and how the Lord changed him that he might accomplish the great work He had for him to do? I would not indeed call our Commander a saint," and a pleasant smile lightened his deep-sunk eyes; "but the zeal for this expedition has, like Saul's vision, transformed the man. That he was idle, a roisterer, a gambler, one even who went as lightly to a duel as to his dinner, is no more to be remembered now. You yourself have seen already at Cozumel how he showed himself indefatigable, grave, bold, cautious, a very leader of men."

While Cortes moved impatiently about from bow to stern, a boy who was sitting astride the bowsprit of the *capitana* as securely as if it had been the back of a surefooted mountain pony followed him with his eyes. He would glance off at the horizon or down at the curling water, but, as if drawn by a magnet, his gaze would turn back to the Commander. Now and then sailors strolling about would hide him from view, and the boy would be restless until once again he caught sight of the man who filled his thoughts.

"If only I could do something for him," he said aloud, for there was no one to overhear him. Yet at the same time that he longed to attract the attention of the Commander, he feared to do so. He did not believe that Cortes was as yet even conscious of his existence, and Fernando feared that when he did notice him he might say that he was too young to take part in the great expedition and must be sent back to Cuba.

He could see now that Cortes held in his hand the banner which he had had made just before he sailed and was examining it proudly as a symbol of his future achievement. The breeze freshened suddenly and, catching the bit of velvet like a sail, whipped it out of Cortes's hand, over the rail into the waves below. Cortes gazed after it regretfully, and with it sank his heart as at a bad omen.

Fernando's act was almost instinctive. He swung himself back on to the deck, ran to the port rail and dived off into the water. The velvet, not yet water-soaked, lay stretched out on the light wave a few feet from the ship, though the distance increased each moment. There was little danger to a good swimmer, and Fernando had not much difficulty in reaching

THE KNIFE STRUCK

and grasping the banner. Holding it above his head in one hand, he swam with the other towards the ship. It was a long swim, though the ship had been turned back by orders of Antonio, and he was glad when the *capitana* met him halfway. A rope was thrown over the side and, thrusting the banner inside of his jerkin, Fernando caught hold and pulled himself up to the deck.

He was seized with a sudden shyness when he saw that he must stand face to face with Cortes, but he bowed and held out to him the dripping banner. Cortes smiled at the sight of the slight wet figure and said:

"It was a gallant act, young sir, and I thank you. If my banner had been lost I fear me I should have thought it a bad sign for the success of our undertaking. Now Youth has brought me aid, and it needs no prophet to unriddle that omen. What are you called? I saw at Cozumel that you could pull a bow well for your years."

"I am Fernando de Casteñeda, Sir," answered the boy, whose heart beat with surprised pleasure at the knowledge that the Commander had noticed him.

"And how do you happen here, in this expedition that is for men?" asked Cortes again.

Fernando felt that the time had come when he must plead his best.

"Don Hernando," he answered, "my brother planned to sail with you, and because there were only the two of us left out of our family, he consented, after many prayers on my part, to let me accompany him. For not he, nor anyone else," and the boy's eyes now gazed straight at Cortes, "so longed to seek

adventure as did I. Only a few days before we were to embark he died of the fever, and I besought Don Gonsalvo de Sandoval, his friend, to take me on board. And now, Señor," —Fernando clasped his hands in entreaty—"you will not send me back, I pray. For I am strong and soon can I do the work of a man."

Cortes smiled. The boy's enthusiasm was akin to his own, and his quickness in rescuing the banner had touched his fancy.

"I have no page," he said as if speaking to himself. "It was hard enough to get away at all and there was no time to hunt for one." Then he looked fixedly at the boy as he asked: "Fernando, would you like to serve me?"

Fernando could not find words to answer. This good fortune was more than he had ever dreamed could come to him. Cortes understood the reason of his silence, but could not resist saying:

"You hesitate; you think that I shall be a harsh master. You are right. If you serve me you will not lie on a silken cushion like a page in a royal castle."

Fernando was in despair, fearing that Cortes had misunderstood his lack of words and that he would recall his offer. If words would not come, then he must trust to deeds, so kneeling on one knee, he kissed Cortes's hand again and again.

"Good!" exclaimed Cortes, "it is settled then. You shall serve me, and time it is indeed that I had someone to look after my armour, which grows rusty in this damp air."

He bade Fernando as his first duty, as soon as he had changed his clothes, to dry the banner carefully and see that no further harm came to it.

When the boy had gone below, blissfully happy, Cortes strolled to the stern and stood talking to a young man, both of them gazing at the fleet of ships that followed like a flock of white ducks where the *capitana* led.

"If Medellin, our birthplace, could see her two sons to-day, Gonsalvo," exclaimed Cortes, resting his hand affectionately upon the shoulder of the young man. "Had she known what mariners we both were to be she might have had special prayers for us when we were born thirty-five and twenty-one years agone. I wonder if some other boy now stands on the hills as I used to stand, looking towards the horizon and longing to push it back farther and farther and to follow to the very end of the world. And then, before I scarce knew the name of the Pillars of Hercules, came the news that Columbus had discovered the Indies. From that day, Gonsalvo, whenever I looked towards the horizon it was the West I faced."

"Yea," said Gonsalvo de Sandoval, "I understand."

"I dreamed strange dreams," continued Cortes, "of the Indies after the reports came from Palos; but I could not see in my mind clearly what the new land could be like. 'I'll e'en go myself and find out some day,' I said in my heart. Then when I grew older they sent me to Salamanca, and there in the ancient university all there was for me to explore were the confines of books writ in Latin and the boundaries of a young man's folly. Two restless years I stayed there, wasting my father's florins. 'Twas when I went home from there that I first saw you, Gonsalvo *mios,* and your chestnut hair curled as tightly then as now," and he patted it, while Sandoval looked half sheepish, half pleased.

"I can scarce believe," continued Cortes, "that my dreams and longings have so far come true, that here I stand, the leader of such an expedition as never before set sail, that yonder the land waits, full of adventure, where Spanish arms shall win fame as a score of years ago they won everlasting glory before Granada."

Young Sandoval nodded and felt of his sword with an unconscious motion. He was little given to speech, but Cortes knew that his own words found echo in the heart of the youth.

There was a softness in the balmy air that, like moonlight, disposed a man to confidences. Of late, since the day when Cortes had felt the weight of his great responsibility, he had grown more silent—a leader can not descend too often from his lonely height. But Sandoval was dear to him, one whom he had known in their home town, and moreover, talking was one way of getting through the moments during which his eager spirit strained forward.

"Such weary days were those in Cuba," he continued, pacing back and forth with short nervous steps, "when I had naught to do but play farmer on my land, scold my slaves and make money. It was at least a diversion when I could quarrel with Don Diego Velasquez, some excitement to escape from the prison into which he threw me. He has no love for me, Gonsalvo, since he learned that I was the head of those in Cuba who would have accused him to the crown for his many unjust acts."

"But you became friends once more, did you not?"—Sandoval broke the silence. He had never known just how the

matter stood, a matter in which his own fortunes were now involved.

"Yea, he appeared to forget his grievances and I forgot mine; and then when he planned this expedition and I learned of it, I knew that at last the chance for which I had been waiting all my life had come. I begged him to give me the command and I promised to find the money for the undertaking. I could forgive now the long weary days of idleness on my estate, since they had brought me a fortune. All that I had made I got together, and I mortgaged all that I possessed to buy these ships, to provision them and to arm the soldiers. Velasquez has but a small share in the undertaking. Yet," he continued, glancing behind him and lowering his voice, "I would we had fewer amongst us who love him. I trust them not over much."

"But why," asked Sandoval, "why did Governor Velasquez seek later to stay you?"

"I do not know," answered Cortes, his brows knitting. "Some sudden fit of jealousy, some fear that I might have plans he knew not of to make myself independent and greater than he, may have worked in his brain. He schemed secretly to take away from me my title of Captain General and to entrust the expedition to another. But we foiled him, did we not, Gonsalvo?" and he laughed loudly, "when we took to our heels while Velasquez thought we had not yet pulled on our boots?"

"Fortune favored us," assented the young Spaniard, "as it did in our landing at Cozumel and in our fight there with the Indians. Yet indeed I hope that the folk yonder," and he

pointed to the coast whose blurred blue tinge was growing greener each minute, "will prove more warlike than those of the isle and of the land of the Tabascans. Then there will be no lack of blows for our swords."

"Yours longs already to be at work?" questioned Cortes, smiling. "But it may be it will rust in the scabbard, for who knows whether the tales we have heard be not wrong. Perchance 'tis but a meek flock waiting for us to shepherd them."

"By my faith, I trust not," exclaimed Sandoval emphatically, but Cortes did not hear him; his dark eyes for some moments before caught sight of a small island. He called out to the pilot:

"Is not yonder a fair anchorage, Antonio, sheltered from the north wind?"

" 'Tis for that I have been making for an hour past, Captain General," called back the mariner, and then shouted orders to the seamen.

A fisherman's boat a mile or more from land scurried back to the shore before the pilot could question the rowers as he had intended to do.

Within a half hour all the ships had dropped anchors down into the sapphire waters, the light striking their forks and silvering them as they descended.

On the mainland back of the island the strand was covered with the inhabitants from the nearby villages. Soon a long, low boat was launched and made straight for the *capitana.*

Cortes and his shipmates watched it curiously. Did these people come as friends? If not, there was little to fear from so small a number. But as the boat approached they could see

that bottom, thwarts and even the knees of the rowers were covered with brilliant blossoms and strange fruits. The Indians, smiling and apparently fearless, swung themselves up to the deck of the Spanish vessel, and with gestures of welcome and of deference, handed their offerings first to Cortes, who advanced to meet them, and then to his companions.

"Come hither, Aguilar," called Columbus to the interpreter, "and tell us what they are saying.

"I cannot understand them, Señor," confessed Aguilar after he had listened a moment. "Their tongue is not like that spoken by the people of Yucatan, who kept me prisoner until you came and rescued me. Only by gestures can I communicate with them."

"And that's no more than the rest of us can do," said Cortes in a tone of disappointment, for he had builded much upon the ease with which the Spanish castaway whom he had stumbled upon spoke different Indian dialects. " 'Twill take us many a day now ere we can learn enough of their tongue to get from them the information about this land which we must have."

It was indeed a vexatious delay. Unless some way could be discovered to interpret their words, how could he be sure, thought Cortes, that they had reached the kingdom, reports of whose riches had caused the sending of this expedition?

Then Pedro de Alvarado, who had been listening to the whispers of one of the soldiers, spoke:

"Señor Cortes, there is a way out of the difficulty, it seems. Juan here has just told me that one of the women slaves presented by the old Indian chief at Tabasco says that she is a

native of this land, whence she was sold in slavery to the Tabascans. She can turn their words into the Tabascan tongue, and Aguilar can then render them into our Castilian. 'Tis a long and winding road, but 'twill lead us at last whither we would go."

"St. Peter, my patron saint, be praised!" cried Cortes. "Fetch the girl quickly, Aguilar."

From the little group of Indian women huddled together in the waist of the ship, who were to serve as cooks and for other menial tasks, Aguilar brought back a young girl with bright features, whose quick step and easy bearing had little to recall her position as a slave.

"This is Marina," he said, "or at least that is the way her name would sound to Spanish ears."

The girl spoke to the Indians who had stood waiting without a sign of impatience, and she talked long with them. After she turned and repeated the information she had gained from them to Aguilar in the Tabascan dialect, he spoke it in Spanish, in a loud voice so that none on board should fail to hear.

"We have come," he said, "to the land of the Mexicans, or Aztecs, as they call themselves. It is ruled over by a great monarch, named Montezuma, who dwells seventy leagues away, in a great city, Tenochtitlan, to reach which many high mountain passes must be traversed. It is a land of great extent and of many people," says the maiden.

"But is it the land of gold and of great treasures?" interrupted Cortes, "the land of which we have heard? Is it the country we seek?"

"Aye," answered Aguilar. "Montezuma is the king of the richest people in the world, even so I heard in my captivity. See," and he laid in Cortes's hand a few small gold ornaments which the Indians had placed in his palm; "they say that many more of these await if you will visit their chief, or Cacique, Teuhtlile who rules this province for King Montezuma."

Cortes's face grew bright as the gold in his hand. He had then in truth reached the land he had sought, and thankfulness welled up within him. He ordered presents given to the Aztecs and he bade them inform their Cacique that they were about to land.

It was the first of April, 1519, that the Spaniards first set foot on Mexican soil. Boat after boatload followed that which contained Cortes and his principal officers, among them Gonsalvo de Sandoval, Pedro de Alvarado, Alonzo de Avila, Cristoval de Olid, Alonzo de Puertocarrero and Juan Velasquez de Leon, kinsman of Cortes's enemy, the Governor of Cuba. At the bow of this first boat the standard of Cortes was flying—black velvet all, showing no sign of its wetting, embroidered with gold, in the centre a red cross surrounded by blue and white flames and beneath this the Latin motto: "Friends, let us follow the Cross, and under this sign if we have faith, we shall conquer." Cortes, as he sprang out on the strand, carried it in his left hand, and in the other he took the royal standard of Spain which Cristoval de Olid handed to him, and planting them firmly in the sand, he claimed the land for the King of Spain.

The Aztecs flocked from every side to watch the disembarking.

"You would say," declared Sandoval to Alvarado as they examined them curiously, "that all the folk of the country were here. They do not look upon us as foes," he added almost regretfully, for the Indians were bringing with them food of every kind, mats of cotton and flowers which they presented to the Spaniards.

But Cortes was too good a soldier to let even this peaceful welcome make him neglect the precautions necessary in a strange country. He ordered the precious artillery brought ashore and mounted it on one of the few sandhills that broke the flat land. The horses were tethered in a stall quickly made of bushes. After these important weapons—for so he thought of the horses—had been cared for, rough huts were built for officers and men. And nightfall saw a complete if simple camp finished.

In the early part of the night the men were unable to sleep for excitement and wonder. Bernal Diaz, a Castilian soldier, was the centre of a group which sought by questioning Aguilar and Marina to discover what difficulties and rewards lay ahead of them.

"An army greater in number than yon stars above our heads, you say Montezuma has," commented Diaz lightly, though the glare of the campfire on the faces of his comrades showed him that not all took the news as calmly as he did. "And what of that? When I go into a tavern I do not ask the host to give me bread and wine scotfree. I pay my score. Here too we must pay—with wounds for the glory and the gold we shall take from the land. We Spaniards are soldiers,

not puling children, hey comrade?"—and his broad palm came down with a clap on the nearest shoulder.

His cheerfulness dissipated the feeling of strangeness and unknown terror which had gripped the men for a moment. Soon they were laughing and singing until sleep overcame them.

But there were others in the small army who stayed awake and talked until dawn. Ever since they had sailed from Cuba the adherents of Velasquez had found fault with all that Cortes had done. They blamed him for the fight with the Tabascans and for the loss therein of several of their number. "He plans now to shake off all allegiance to Velasquez," one of them whispered; "therefore we must be on the watch to prevent him, perchance, even to make him a captive and carry him back to Cuba."

"Let us not abide longer in this sickly spot," suggested another. "Here is little gold, and a man were mad who would seek to advance farther into an unknown country with so small a force as ours."

"Fear not," said a third, who was a priest; "before Cortes can think of advancing another step we will act."

Word had been brought Cortes that the Cacique would visit him the next day.

It was Easter morning when Teuhtlile, attended by his train, advanced to meet Cortes, who stood surrounded by his officers. The two leaders observed each other curiously, while each gravely and ceremoniously welcomed the other. Then Father Olmedo said Mass, and the Aztecs showed no sign

of astonishment at a ceremony they could not comprehend. When it was over a feast was served, and then Marina and Aguilar were brought forward in order to interpret between the Spaniard and the Aztec chiefs.

"Why have you come to visit our land?" asked the Cacique.

Cortes answered:

"I am the subject of a potent monarch beyond the seas, who rules over an immense empire, who has kings and princes for his vassals. When news came to him of the greatness of the Mexican empire my master desired me to come hither and enter into communication with its emperor, and he has sent me as an envoy to wait on Montezuma with a present of his good will and a message which I must deliver in person."

The Spaniards could see that the Cacique was not pleased at this speech. The Aztec answered:

"How is it that you have been here only two days and yet you demand to see the emperor? It amazes me to learn that there is another monarch in the world as powerful as Montezuma; but if that be so doubtless Montezuma will be glad to communicate with him. I will send your gift to him and when I have learned of Montezuma's will I will tell it to you."

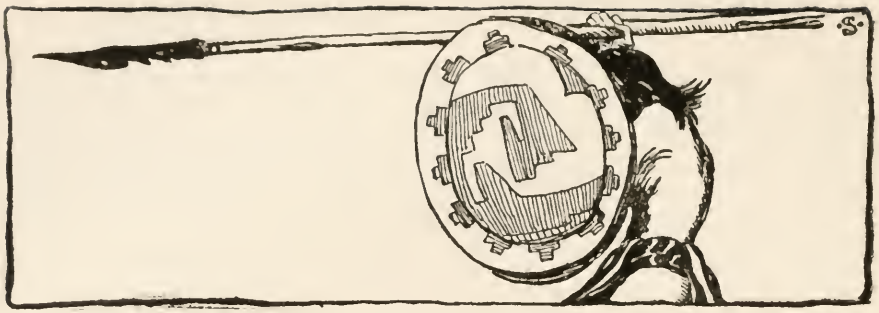
Though the bearing of the Aztec was haughty, the Spaniards forgot to resent it when they beheld the presents the slaves laid at Cortes's feet: ten loads of fine cotton, mantles of rare feather-work, and a small basket filled with ornaments of wrought gold.

"It is indeed the land we sought," exclaimed Cortes joyfully to Alvarado. Then he ordered Fernando to see that the presents for Montezuma were brought forward. These were

an arm chair, carved and painted, a crimson cap with a gold medal on it, bracelets and collars of cut glass, which to the Aztecs seemed very wonderful. Then Teuhtlile, admiring a helmet worn by one of the soldiers, asked for that also to send to the emperor.

"Take it and give it to Montezuma," assented Cortes, "and ask him to return it filled with gold. I would compare the metal with the gold of my country," he added craftily.

Then Teuhtlile and his train withdrew, leaving the Spaniards to await word from Montezuma.



CHAPTER II

The Hunter

WHILE the Spaniards were approaching the Mexican shores the fates of many within its borders were leading—all unknown to them—in directions which must soon cross those of Cortes and of Fernando. Among these were Ahuitzotl, the hunter, and Xicotencatl, the fugitive.

Ahuitzotl was the son of Cacama, a noble Aztec. Since dawn he had been alone in the dense forest in search of game worthy of a hunter, and at last he had come upon the track of a mountain lion.

The gaudy feathers of many-colored birds, the chattering of monkeys that sprang from bough to bough across his path, the almost overpowering odors of brilliant blossoms—none of these sights, sounds and fragrances of a tropical forest had for one moment distracted the young Aztec from his object. He had not notched his bow when a wild turkey whirred up out of the thick underbrush; once even he had seen the footprints of a bear on the wet sand along the bank of a stream he waded,

and had not followed it. It was not for the sake of any easy quarry, thought Ahuitzotl, that one disobeyed a king.

His first bear he had killed when he was nine, he recalled with pride; for even though it had not been full grown in either height or strength, still his father and his father's retainers had praised the young hunter. That was no bad feat for a child, he said now to himself; but it behooved one who was five years older to outdo his childish victory. In all the Mexican land, old hunters had told him, there was no beast so dangerous, so wily, so strong as the mountain lion, the ocelot.

Ahuitzotl had sworn by the gods that he would not eat nor leave the forest until he had killed an ocelot. For weeks his mind had dwelt only on this desire. He feared the softness of the palace life might have weakened his muscles, that his court garments might be teaching his legs too quiet a gait. Now, as he strode naked, save for breech-cloth and sandals, he knew that his fears had been unnecessary. For five hours he had walked through the thick jungle, making a path often by slashing with his knife the twisted trunks of massive creepers. He had noted the almost imperceptible traces of many beasts, but until now he had seen none that told of the passing of an ocelot. And all these hours he had been climbing and the jungle had been growing less dense as he ascended. Now, as he neared the top of the mountain the sky widened from the narrow bit over the tree tops; there were spaces too between the trees, more of which were cypresses and oaks whose straighter, compacter branches made it easier for the light to penetrate.

Then he had come upon the half devoured carcass of a hare, and all about it were footprints of the ocelot. Doubtless the

beast, hearing the approaching hunter, had deserted his dinner the moment before. Ahuitzotl's heart beat more quickly as he stood there, glancing in all directions. Three trees ahead of him he caught sight of his quarry. He fitted an arrow in his bowstring and let it fly.

The arrow was well sped, and the young hunter's aim a true one; the shaft pierced the tree just behind the notch where the ocelot had crouched but—the ocelot was not there when it arrived! He had sprung over to a large birch nearer to the boy. Perhaps the beast was as eager for human blood as the boy was for the beast's. At all events, he showed no desire to avoid the contest.

Ahuitzotl measured the distance; it was too short for an effective shot; so, throwing down his bow, he began to climb the trunk, knife in his teeth. The beast waited until the boy was within reach. Then with one sweeping claw, quick as a flash of lightning, he ripped open the boy's shoulder in five long red wounds.

But the boy did not stop as any beast might have had the right to expect; instead, he raised himself upright on the branch to his full height just as the ocelot leaned down to meet him. Again the awful claws scratched their way through human flesh, but, quickly shifted from teeth to hand, the knife struck almost at the same instant into the ocelot's brain, and boy and beast fell heavily to earth.

When he came to himself a few seconds later, Ahuitzotl jumped up and examined proudly his dying quarry, unmindful even of his own wounds. It was a splendid creature, and the boy cried out aloud his chant of victory.

After he had washed his shoulder at a cold trickling stream, Ahuitzotl lifted the dead ocelot on his back and began his descent to the valley.

He had left the garments which he had worn when he entered the forest beneath a guava tree by the side of a stream and had weighted them down with pebbles. It was a long way for anyone to walk with wounds growing stiffer each moment, yet Ahuitzotl's heart so rejoiced at his success that he was almost indifferent to pain and fatigue. Nevertheless he was glad when he came in sight of the stream, into which he plunged after depositing the ocelot on the bank. The water freshened the tired muscles, and when he had moistened the leaves of certain healing plants and laid them over the cruel scratches he felt more comfortable.

He found his garments where he had left them, but did not touch them. He stretched himself, delighting to feel no binding clothes. He gathered some figs and cactus fruit and ate them. Then, with a long sigh that betokened both bodily fatigue and mental contentment, he threw himself on the ground, resting his head on the furry pillow of his dead enemy, and was soon asleep.

When he awoke at dawn the forest was again verbal with the voices of birds and animals. The air was still fresh, and Ahuitzotl jumped up and down a moment to start the blood running. His eyes sparkled as they fell on the ocelot. For a moment he was as keenly happy as he had ever been in his life: he was free, unhampered by custom or rule, and he had proved himself a hunter such as old hunters could not help honouring.

Then his head drooped and he remembered. He had taken the liberty which would never have been granted him. He had thrown aside the garments and insignia of the palace, but he could not forget, hard as he tried, that he belonged there. He wondered what Montezuma, his royal master, thought of the absence of his favorite page, Ahuitzotl, whether his companions imagined that something serious had befallen to keep him from his duties. He was sure that no one in all the court would even dream that he had dared run away that he might enjoy a day's hunting in the forest. It was impossible that any boy should dare act thus, said Ahuitzotl, the page, to himself; but Ahuitzotl, the hunter, wondered that anyone should choose to stay within walls when there was such sport to be had in the forest.

However, the excitement of yesterday had subsided a little, and now he must decide what he would do. No man had ever deserted Montezuma's service and faced him again; and though the great king had always shown kindness to him, Ahuitzotl dared not go back and confess.

The town and countryside over which his own father ruled as cacique lay farther away, some leagues from Montezuma's city of Tenochtitlan. He determined to go thither. He took up his mantle and bright sash, woven of the finest cotton and dyed red as a parrot's tail. But he could not bring himself to put them on. They were a sign of the life he had run away from. So he left them lying, and swinging the ocelot to his shoulder, once more started off through the forest in the opposite direction to that from which he had entered it the day before.

It was near sundown when Ahuitzotl emerged from the forest and beheld at the farther end of the open plain before him his father's village. On a mound raised a few feet above the huts of the villagers, he saw again for the first time in three years the white stone walls of his home.

Men and women sat outside of their huts eating their evening meal and calling across to neighbors the news of the day, of the taxes to be paid, of the height to which the maize had shot up since the last rain, of the coming festival. Children played around them, noisy and happy.

Ahuitzotl stood still watching the scene. It was simple, homelike after the ceremonious court life which had so wearied him. He began to pick out different individuals in the groups before him, hunters, farmers, boys whom he had played with and fought. He wondered if they would know him.

Suddenly one of the men glancing up, caught sight of him and pointed out the stranger to his wife; and soon the eyes of all the village were upon the approaching hunter, and there were many speculations as to who he might be.

Ahuitzotl gave a peculiar whistle, such as the village had not heard since he left it to be educated by the priests at Tenochtitlan, and men and women sprang to their feet, crying out as they ran to welcome him:

"Ahuitzotl! Ahuitzotl! The son of our Cacique!"

Never had the boy known such a moment of triumph as now when he told how he had slain the fierce ocelot and listened to the loud praise of his prowess. As he strode along towards the father's house, escorted by all the village, he asked questions of everyone, of how each had fared, who had married

and who had died. But even while he talked he kept wondering what reception he would meet with from his father. There at the gate he stood; his ears had caught the call unheard since his son had been away. The two great stone figures of the gods on either side of the lintel seemed still to the boy, as they had always seemed, to grow more lifelike and more awful in the dusk.

"Ahuitzotl, is it you?" asked Cacama, the Cacique.

"It is I, my father," replied the boy. "I have brought you a gift."

He threw the ocelot on the ground at the feet of the Cacique.

The villagers had left the two together, only the servants of the household peered curiously from the distance at their young master.

"And where did you find the beast?" asked the Cacique, bending to examine him.

"In the forest," answered Ahuitzotl, "near the mountain top, where my knife ended him."

The boy noted with a feeling of relief and pleasure the gleam of pride in his father's eyes.

" 'Tis no mean gift you bring, my son," and the older man's tone, though he tried to make it stern, could not conceal his affection. " Yet I fear me you have paid too dearly for it. Nay, I mean not your scars," he continued as the boy's hand rubbed the marks of the claws. "All hunters must be willing to pay with these; but you have paid with the favor of Montezuma. Do you know that he has sent messengers in all directions to learn what evil has befallen you; and what will our

dread Lord say when he learns that you are here of your free will and unharmed?"

"I hated the court, father," the boy blurted out. "'Tis no life for a warrior. One grows soft and a weakling, with the feasting and wearing fine garments."

"And where are your garments?" inquired Cacama, suddenly aware of his son's appearance.

"In the forest; they had become to me like the garb of a slave."

Cacama was silent. The night had fallen; white moths were flying low through the branches and blossoms of the plants of the garden in which the Cacique, like most Aztec noblemen, took keen pleasure. At last he spoke, and now his voice was indeed stern.

"What are your plans, Ahuitzotl? Since you claim for yourself the liberty of a man you must assume the responsibilities of a man. Do you perchance know of any spot where you can hide from the anger of Montezuma, whom you have offended?"

At these words of his father all the defiance of Ahuitzotl fell away from him, and he was overwhelmed with the seriousness of the situation. The pride in his valor and endurance was vanished; instead of feeling himself a man and a warrior, he grew suddenly conscious that he was still a child, with no power to stop the descent of the stone he had started rolling with so light a heart. In a low voice he entreated:

"Help me, my father, for I know not what to do."

Cacama's heart grew soft at this demand for help; he laid his hand gently on the boy's shoulder.

"Come, my son, welcome to your home again. It is your refuge, and when you have eaten and drunk as a weary hunter needs to eat and drink, we will consult together."

Calling a slave, he bade him care for the skin of the ocelot, and to others he gave orders to prepare a supper. When this was over and Ahuitzotl had greeted all the members of the household, he and his father sat alone. Cacama asked:

"Tell me, Ahuitzotl, what it was your desire to be. I sent you to the priests to be educated, as it is meet for one of thy rank. Moreover, I thought you might be glad to become a priest yourself, to serve the gods and to be the master of much wisdom. Then you grew restless in the temple, and when Montezuma beheld you and sent for you to be his head page, you were all eagerness for this new life. Then even the favor of the Emperor was not sufficient for you and you have thrown it aside as lightly as your garments in the forest. What then, in the name of the gods, would you be—if Montezuma asks not your life for your disobedience?"

"I would be a warrior, father, even as you and your fathers have been," replied the boy with no hesitation.

"And where should one learn better to be a warrior than under the eye of Montezuma, the great warrior?" asked Cacama in astonishment. "Have you then been deaf not to have heard of his glorious battles?"

"But they were long ago," objected the boy; "now the King has less love for war and I fear me little intention of setting out on any new campaign. I grew restless waiting."

"Impatient child," scolded Cacama. "Suppose yonder palm could not wait to grow. And did you think to find war

in the forest after you had slain your ocelot, or here in my village?" he asked scornfully.

"I scarcely knew what I expected, father," confessed Ahuitzotl. "I think I hoped that you would take me somewhere to the borders of the empire where there is always fighting; yet I fear I had no very clear idea of aught further than a day's freedom and to prove myself a hunter."

"Ah!" sighed the Cacique with relief. "You are but a childish truant after all. Perhaps I may succeed in convincing Montezuma that you are still too young to be accountable."

Ahuitzotl's pride suffered at this speech, yet he was wise enough to know that it was his youth alone that could serve as his excuse.

Cacama rose.

"We must lose no more time, my son; we must throw ourselves upon the mercy of our Lord. Not even the needed rest after thy exertions may be thine. You may console thyself for your weariness on the walk to Tenochtitlan by calling it the forced march of a warrior under orders. Bid the slaves bring you garments, and then we must set forth."

It was early next morning that Cacama and Ahuitzotl were admitted to the presence of Montezuma and awaited in humble posture and deep anxiety his judgment. At last, after what seemed to them years, the monarch spoke:

"Because you are a child, Ahuitzotl, I shall not judge your act as that of a man nor punish you with a man's punishment, which were death. As a child I punish you by sending you back to the priests to be taught wisdom until, perchance, some day it may please me to call you to my service once more."

The boy made a humble obeisance in gratitude for this royal clemency.

So Ahuitzotl found himself once more in the school within the confines of the temple, and during the hours spent in wearisome lessons he regretted the freer days of his pagehood. He was taught music as well as the service of the gods and helped the priests in their careful calculations of the calendar.

Montezuma's heart was softened towards him when Cacama presented the cured skin of the ocelot as Ahuitzotl's offering. The bravery and skill of the young hunter pleased him, and within two months he sent word to the temple that the boy was forgiven and was to return to his duties as page on the day when the wedding festivities of his daughter, Princess Tecuichpo, should take place.

The High Priest who brought this message found Ahuitzotl poring over picture writings which represented the wars of the early part of Montezuma's reign.

"You are free to leave us on the morrow, my son," he said in a kinder tone than anyone else had ever heard him use. "Perhaps you will serve the gods better as a warrior than as a priest, by sending plenty of captives to be sacrificed to them."

"But I fear, Servant of the Gods," the boy interposed, "that there will not be many more wars. Our Lord hath conquered so many lands that with whom shall he now fight?"

"Fear not, Ahuitzotl," replied the priest. "This land belongs to the dread Huitzilopotchli, the God of War, who will never let his altars want for victims. Years and cycles shall pass, our names and, perchance it might even be, the very name of Montezuma be forgotten, but the day will never come when

this land, this Anahuac, this Mexico, shall be long at peace. Fear not, you that glow like a lighted torch, that there will be no work for your arm to do. Even now have captives been brought from the borders of Tlascala, where there have been skirmishes, and they will be offered to the gods tomorrow. One of the youths is a young Cacique of noble bearing, though clad in rough garments such as those mountaineers wear.

Ahuitzotl had many questions to ask concerning them, but the High Priest was not minded to waste more time.

"Farewell," he said; "return to the palace tomorrow at dawn."

CHAPTER III

The Fugitive

AS Ahuitzotl was leaving the teocalli next morning, he was nearly knocked down by a young priest who rushed past him with most unpriestly haste. As the boy glanced up in astonishment he saw that he had been mistaken, though the robes were indeed those of a servitor in the temple, the muscular arms and legs could belong only to a soldier or hunter. Moreover, the face was not even that of an Aztec; its features were those of a foreigner.

Remembering the words of the High Priest, it came to him that here must be one of the Tlascalan captives who was trying to escape. Ahuitzotl immediately started after him. The fugitive was already a hundred yards in advance, and when he heard the flying steps behind, he increased his speed.

Ahuitzotl followed him around one corner after another, running his best. But the desperate Tlascalan was older and stronger, and increased his lead at every turn. At last, fearing reproof for wasted time, Ahuitzotl gave up the chase and

returned to the Palace. The captive could not go far before being stopped by the guards.

Having shaken off his pursuer, the Tlascalan paused a moment, panting. Near him was the entrance of a windowless hall, and he slipped hastily into its semi-obscurity. There he stood still in order to catch his breath and to listen. From the distance came the sounds of laughter and singing, and behind him, in the courtyard he had just left he could still hear the splashing of water in the fountain.

Though for a moment he was safe, as his keen eyes and ears assured him, he dared not linger. Evidently the hall was a thoroughfare through that wing of the palace.

Yet how should he know where to turn, he who had never before set foot within these walls? Any chamber or courtyard he entered might prove a trap for one ignorant of its use or occupants. Perhaps it were just as well to leave it all to the gods and to walk blindly in any direction. However, a famous hunter who had stalked both the most dangerous and the most timorous of game had gained habits of weariness that he could not throw off if he would; some of them might help him even here in the heart of the great city, where he was the hunted, as they had helped him when he was the hunter in the forests.

He listened again. The sound of laughter came from before him; the courtyard lay to his right; he had then a choice between turning to the left or continuing in the hall. He turned to the left, into a small corridor that led out of the larger hall. He did not run; if anyone appeared he might be able to pass as one who had some business there. More-

over, he did not fear any pursuers within the palace. When he reached the street again, if he ever reached it, he would find them in wait at every crossing. No causeway would be safe, not even the hills without the city; their eagerness to recapture him would urge them on until—if the gods were kind—he might at last succeed in reaching his own blessed mountains.

He stood still again, for he had felt, almost before he had heard, footsteps coming towards him. Quickly he made his decision, as once in the past he had made one as momentous, when on a narrow mountain trail he had had to decide to turn back or to face a bear that barred his way. He had gone on then and his knife had done its work so well that it was the bear and not he that tumbled over the precipice. So now too he decided: He must go on.

The steps approached, and before they rounded the corner of the corridor the fugitive's muscles relaxed—that was only the tread of a slave. If need be, he could silence his outcries, but he hoped that the priestly garments he wore would be his peaceful passport.

And so they proved. The slave looked his momentary astonishment at the strange face in this portion of the palace; but the robe of the priest which the fugitive had flung about him as he made his escape silenced all questions. Of course, on such a day, the priesthood would be active everywhere; so bowing his deference to this unknown servant of the gods, he hurried by, staggering under the load of rugs, whose vivid colors made a passing brightness in the sombre hall.

There was no sombreness in the next corridor that branched

again to the left. This the fugitive found carpeted with soft new palm mats, and its walls, of red stone, were hung with cotton cloths brilliant with paintings representing victorious battles of his enemies. The sunlight too came in through the opening at the end which led, he saw, into a tiny court. He peered eagerly forward to make certain that it was unoccupied and that no one was on the low roof that surrounded it. Then he flung himself down beneath the leaves of a wide-spreading, low-growing palm that served both as a protecting screen and as a shelter from the sun.

He was glad to have this moment of rest. His nerves were as strong as his body, nevertheless, he had undergone that day enough to shake the stoutest heart. For the moment he had succeeded in escaping a most horrible death; but unless the gods were on his side, he knew that no vigilance and no bravery would save him, so great were the dangers that surrounded him.

Even as he lay there, so quiet that a bright butterfly lit on his knee and balanced itself, waving its wings in a drowsy rhythm, his eyes and his mind were busied reckoning up the possibilities of escape. It would not be difficult to climb to the roof, but once there, his position might be worse instead of better. He had no means of telling whether another court, or several courts, lay beyond, or whether its outer walls came down to the street. At all events, he must wait until nightfall to explore.

Directly opposite him was a large room, the chamber doubtless of some woman of high rank, to judge by the fineness of its furnishings and the rich carving of the ceiling. This room

and the corridor by which he had come were the only openings from the court.

It was so quiet beneath the palm tree that the sound of approaching voices was a terrifying interruption. The fugitive again decided quickly. He sprang to his feet, rushed into the chamber and hid behind a painted cotton hanging on the wall.

Even as he crouched there in danger of his life, his lip curled in disdain at all the luxury about him. His own people in the mountain homes had no need of such soft coverings, such ornaments of gold, such multitudes of slaves. And his heart cried out its scorn of his enemies so loudly that he felt it must be audible.

Through the court they came, straight into the chamber—two girls. One, taller than the other, as he could dimly see through the weave of the curtain, bore herself as one accustomed to be obeyed; the other was doubtless a waiting maid.

"Princess," said the latter as she undid the veil which hung over the dark braids, "rest a while on the couch. This will be a long fatiguing day for you, and your eye must not be dimmed."

But the young princess had no desire to rest. She was too full of life for that, too young to rest in preparation for future fatigue.

"It's my wedding day," she sang as she laid aside her outer mantle, "and I shall do only what I wish from now on. But oh! I would that I had my Maztla here to sing with me. Why did I leave him behind?"

" 'Tis in truth a pity," condoled the other mockingly, "but

why have you not sent a slave to the gardens to fetch the bird?"

"Little silly one," answered Princess Tecuichpo, "do you not remember that Maztla's strong beak has broken several fingers already. He will not come down from his seat in the tree for anyone but his mistress or for Guatemozin, my cousin and my husband to be."

"Then there is naught to do but forget him," suggested her companion as she began to open carved boxes and to take from them the wedding garments. "It is strange indeed if you can not forget a mere pet at such a time. Surely Lord Guatemozin will not be flattered to hear you."

"He has already listened to my complaints," answered Tecuichpo, but her thoughts were distracted by the sight of the soft cotton robes, the finest woven on any loom in Anahuac, the gorgeous mantle of featherwork that glistened like the humming-bird throats from which it was made, and the finely wrought golden chains and bracelets. She was still so young that this would be the first time she had ever worn the costume and the ornaments that belonged to her position as the daughter of the King.

While she fingered them lovingly the fugitive was standing as motionless as the statue of the Sun God in the corner opposite him. He was afraid that even his breath might ripple the curtain and betray him. He knew now that he had stumbled into the chamber of the princess, daughter of the mighty Montezuma, Lord of Anahuac and many allied countries. It was her wedding day then which was the cause of the great festival at which he was to have been offered as a sacrifice!

Though he could have easily overpowered the two maidens, their outcry, he knew, would endanger his escape. The only course for him was to wait where he was until dark.

Then once more he heard footsteps advancing down the corridor. This time they were not those of a woman nor of a slave. That firm tread could belong, he felt sure, to a warrior only. The maidens also had heard the steps, though fully a half minute later than his keen ears.

"Guatemozin!" exclaimed Tecuichpo, "what brings you here?"

And the fugitive at the sound of that name which already was spoken with respect by his enemies, peered curiously through the curtain that he might judge what this young foe, so nearly his own age, looked like.

Prince Guatemozin stood in the doorway, waiting permission to enter; the handmaid of the Princess bowed low, touching the earth with her hand, which she then raised to her forehead. Tecuichpo, catching sight of a huge gorgeous macaw sitting on his shoulder, its long red and blue tail feathers almost touching the floor, its curved beak resting confidingly against the young warrior's cheek, ran forward with a cry of delight.

"Maztla, my Maztla!" she cried, and the bird, arching its neck forward and flapping its wings, could scarcely wait to climb on to the perch of her finger.

It was not until she had smoothed the bird's plumage that she turned to her betrothed and said:

"And did you in truth go all the way to the hill just to gratify my whim, Guatemozin?"

"I would do more than that, little wife," he answered, smil-

ing. "May I now sit down for a moment's rest and talk before they come to array you in all that splendor?" and he pointed to the garments spread out on the chest.

The handmaid brought him a seat and then ran off down the hall to fetch him refreshments. The fugitive, who studied his enemy closely, could not but admit that his vigorous body bore no sign of having been softened by the luxury of his uncle's court. His face was bronzed by long exposure, and his arms and legs uncovered by his short robe, looked firm and muscular as his own. He carried no weapons, but the fugitive did not doubt for an instant that he knew how to use them.

The Prince and the Princess chatted lightly together. They had been playmates all their lives, and though they were now lovers and soon to be husband and wife, there was no shyness between them. They talked of the gardens of Chapultepec whence he had fetched the macaw, and of their pleasure in that beautiful spot. Then Tecuichpo asked:

"What meant the excitement in the city? There was such shouting and running about in the streets an hour ago. I had meant to send a slave to discover the cause for me, but then I began to long for Maztla and forgot."

"One of the sacrifices escaped from the *teocalli,*" (Mexican temple), replied Guatemozin, "one of the number that will be offered to the gods in honour of our marriage festival. Ahuitzotl, your father's page, who has just returned, told me that he pursued him a long way. They have sought for him all through the city."

"That's a bad omen," cried Tecuichpo, covering her face

with her hands as if to ward off the evil. "Has he been taken again?" she queried eagerly.

"Nay, not yet, though the priests swarm through every street. It is strange where he can have hidden himself. But soon he must be discovered. He will betray himself wherever he may be; he is a foreigner, one of those cursed Tlascalans. He is of high rank, the priests told me, the nephew of one of the four great Caciques who govern the Republic of Tlascala."

"How was he captured at first?" asked the girl, leaning forward on her stool until her hand almost touched the curtain that hid the fugitive.

"He had led a war party down the mountain slope that divides their tiny country from ours," answered Guatemozin. "They had come on a foraging expedition, since we are not at actual war just now, in the hopes that they might procure a goodly supply of cotton and salt, which they perforce must do without, surrounded as their boundaries are by our allies. His party was but small and though they wrought their will in a few villages near the border, a party of our troops that marched upon them as soon as a frightened farmer had reached the nearest post with the news of their presence, overpowered them easily and returned with a score of prisoners for our temples."

The little handmaid now came back with a golden goblet filled with *chocolatl* chilled with snow from the mountains, and when Guatemozin had drunk she slipped back to a rug in the corner.

Behind the curtain the fugitive's body was quivering, with anger, not with fear.

" 'Tis a pity," and Tecuichpo spoke earnestly, for she was

talking of earnest matters such as she had heard discussed by her father and his councillors when Montezuma had sometimes allowed her to sit beside his throne, "it is a pity that Anahuac and Tlascala should be at enmity. The arms of my father are very powerful, but not yet has he been able to conquer that little country."

"But soon he will conquer it, oh! wise little statesman," exclaimed Guatemozin, rising, "soon will another expedition be sent against those dogs of Tlascala, and I shall bid farewell for a day or two to your smiles till I bring thee back the wives and daughters of its Caciques for your slaves."

"Never!" cried a voice, and the fugitive, bellying the curtain before him in his fury, sprang upon the astonished Prince. The little handmaid shrieked with terror, but Tecuichpo, whose quick wits told her that here was no matter to be made public, rushed towards her and held her hand over her mouth.

The two youths rolled over on the ground together, their evenly matched strength giving first one and then the other a momentary mastery. Since neither was armed, the contest seemed likely to be prolonged forever.

Tecuichpo knew that any minute her slaves might appear. Then she remembered the small jewelled-handled obsidian knife she wore as an ornament in her girdle. Stooping over the combatants, she slipped it into the hand of Guatemozin, who chanced to be uppermost. In another second the Prince had plunged it into the fugitive's right shoulder.

After a few ineffectual struggles, the Tlascalan was impotent. Guatemozin bound his arms to his side with a scarf Tecuichpo handed him. Then he bade his prisoner rise.

"Are you he of whom I spake," he asked, "the sacrifice who escaped from the teocalli?"

"Xicotencatl am I," answered the other proudly, "son of the great Cacique of Tlascala, known as the Old Xicotencatl."

"And what have you to do here in the chamber of the Princess Tecuichpo, in the palace of King Montezuma?"

"Chance led me here as chance leads the hunted deer to a place of safety."

"The gods have not been good to you, Tlascalan," exclaimed the young Aztec scornfully, "to lead you into my hands."

" 'Twas a woman's weapon that conquered me," replied the other as scornfully, "and not your hands."

"Your words are powerless to hurt me," cried out the Prince, who, however, spoke not the truth, since it irked him to realize that it was indeed to the knife and not to his superior strength that he owed his victory. "Nor will many more words, even harmless though they be, pass your lips," he mocked; "for the priests await you on the steps of the teocalli. Their knives are far sharper than this woman's weapon, and before night falls the gods shall enjoy the fragrance of your burning heart."

The Tlascalan made no answer, but his eyes looked fearlessly into those of his captor. Guatemozin read in them what his foe meant him to read. He was silent a moment then he said:

"You believe, Tlascalan, that you are the better warrior and that I could not have conquered if we had been evenly matched with bow or knife?"

The Tlascalan nodded.

"That I give you up to the priests because I fear you?" questioned the Prince further.

The prisoner made no answer, but his lip curled.

"Nay then," cried Guatemozin, "your spirit shall not carry such a boast to Huitzilopotchli, dread God of War."

Turning to the handmaiden, he commanded:

"Fetch me quickly another knife."

Tecuichpo started. "What is it you will do?" she asked.

"I will loose him," replied her cousin, "and we two shall meet again and fight till the weaker falls."

The Tlascalan's eyes sparkled. "Prince Guatemozin is a gallant foe," he exclaimed.

Then from the distance there came the sound of music heralding the approach of the Princess's maidens. Already the perfume of incense and the masses of flowers they bore with them had reached the chamber. The two youths realized that it was too late now for their contest.

Guatemozin cut the bonds of his captive and threw his own mantle over him.

"Hide there beneath the palm in the courtyard," he commanded, "until the night. I will send to you further disguise and a safe-conduct by which you may pass out of the city and through the country to your own borders. For I could not live to remember that, dying, you believed yourself the better warrior. Then when you have reached your own land wait and I shall come and challenge you to meet me on the battle field and the gods shall decide between us."

Xicotencatl stepped forward till he stood before Tecuichpo and saluted her.

"Princess," he said, "you are mating with a gallant man. I would he were a Tlascalan."

Then, facing Guatemozin, he exclaimed:

"But since you are an Aztec, the foe of my land and my foe, I will hope each night that the next day will see us face to face in battle that you may see how a 'Tlascalan dog' can bite."

CHAPTER IV

Strange Tidings

PRINCESS TECUICHPO'S marriage to her cousin, Prince Guatemozin, had filled the streets of Tenochtitlan with rejoicings. There had been feastings and dancings at which the court and many of the populace had taken part. When these festivities were over Montezuma had left the city for the spacious gardens and cooler air of his country palace at Chapultepec.

He now sat beneath a wide-spreading cypress tree, holding a court of justice. Behind him and at his sides the great nobles of Anahuac stood grouped, and back of them a score of the royal guard, each member of which was of high birth. Those who had known the Emperor only as a fierce warrior and relentless conqueror could scarcely believe that this painstaking judge who patiently weighed the merits of the cases brought before him and who gave his decision after full deliberation could be the dreaded Montezuma.

One of the Caciques from the allied country of Tezcuco

expressed this amazement to his host, who had brought his friend to witness the royal audience.

"Surely your Emperor is as mild as a turkey. I had thought him a hawk in fierceness."

"You see him now amongst his children," explained the Aztec. "These merchants and farmers and even slaves are close to his heart. But wait, presently you shall behold another Montezuma. Even now a deputation from the far South which our arms have conquered is coming. These are strangers to him and their loyalty suspect."

The approaching deputation felt this enmity of their dread to beseech their new sovereign to lighten the heavy taxes that everyone, even those of high degree, had to don when they entered the presence of the Emperor, who alone might shine in the splendor of brilliant robes and jewels. They had come to beseech their new sovereign to lighten the heavy taxes that had been laid upon their province. But Montezuma frowned as he listened and then waved them away angrily, saying harshly:

"Dare not to question the will of Montezuma. By his might he has conquered, and you must pay the tribute demanded."

And cutting his audience short, he rose and moved off down the garden path, leaving the petitioners with heavy hearts at the thought of the news they must bear back with them.

"It seems to me," said the Tezcucan to his friend, "that it had been a wiser policy, if I may judge your Emperor, to conciliate the conquered. They would the sooner become reconciled and contented subjects if their riches were not taken away from them by the tax collectors."

THE EYES OF THE EUROPEANS GLISTENED

"That may be," assented the other; "I am no statesman myself. Still it matters little to Montezuma whether a few thousand new subjects be content or not. There are not enough of them to rise in revolt. His power is too mighty."

"A root of a vine is a weak thing," said the Tezcucan; "yet when many roots pry through a strong wall they may destroy it."

Montezuma had waved back his attendants, except two of the guard who followed fifty paces behind, and his page Ahuitzotl, who bore a cushion for the monarch should he wish to sit down. The Aztec Emperor loved the gardens with their hoary trees and their brilliant and fragrant flowers, arranged with such taste and such scientific knowledge that no plant which grew within the confines of his entire realm, if it could bear transplanting, but was to be found there. Fountains and little canals kept the air fresh, and everywhere the branches were filled with bright-hued birds. The place was dear to him for many reasons: there he had spent many pleasant days, and everything spoke of the pride his ancestors had taken in making these gardens more beautiful than any other spot in their known world.

Montezuma walked slowly in the shade of gigantic oaks, breathing in the spicy fragrance of the flowers, and as he went his mind was busy with thoughts of the way the kingdom won by his fathers had grown like the trees about him, enlarging its boundaries as they enlarged their girth with each year. Now, under his governance, the realm had widened until it was washed on either side by the seas. It pleased him as he strolled to play with this fancy of likening Anahuac to the garden:

the brilliant blossoms were the riches of his treasure houses, filled with gold and precious stones; the birds darting about were his people, warriors those in the most gorgeous plumage, and farmers and merchants those in soberer coloring. But the priests—to what should he compare them? He had himself belonged to the priesthood before he had been a warrior and before he had been chosen king.

While his mind was still pleasantly occupied with these fancies he came out from the grove into a more open terrace, below which lay the tennis-ground. A number of young nobles were playing at this favorite game; but when one of them chanced to glance up and beheld their monarch leaning upon the red stone railing above them, they threw down their balls and made low obeisances. Montezuma waved to them to continue their game and stood there watching while they ran to and fro and leaped gracefully into the air, their lightly clad or almost naked bodies showing the play of their well developed muscles. It pleased him to note that the best player was Guatemozin, his nephew and husband of his daughter.

And Guatemozin proved to be the victor in the hardly contested game, and Montezuma sent Ahuitzotl to carry to him as a prize the fan of fine feather work he took from his own girdle. The young Prince sprang up the steps to the terrace and gave thanks for the gift.

"It is naught," said Montezuma, "but my son may ask of his father any gift he desires."

"There is in truth one for which he longs," said Guatemozin, encouraged by Montezuma's kind words and tone.

"Speak," commanded the monarch.

"That you would make a new war against our enemies of Tlascala and let me go forth to win victory for you."

Montezuma was silent for a moment, astounded at this boldness. That even a prince of his own blood had dared suggest when and where he the King should go to war was an unheard-of liberty. He thought of calling up the guard and ordering the Prince to be placed in restraint and kept there until he realized the gravity of his deed. Then he remembered Tecuichpo, and his face softened. He loved his daughter dearly and he could bring no sorrow on her youthful happiness.

"Montezuma makes war when it pleases him," he said sternly; but he added in a kinder tone: "When the time comes see, Guatemozin, that you make good your boast."

The young Prince knew that it was useless to urge further.

"Perchance," the monarch continued, as if he felt a need to reply to a question that had not been asked aloud, "you have wondered, as have others, why Montezuma has not already conquered the little land of Tlascala and made it a part of his kingdom. Know then that I have spared it until now that the prisoners of its people taken in battle might furnish sacrifices for the altars of our gods."

A sound of singing, of young voices, broke into the grave words, and down the glade came Princess Tecuichpo and her attendants, all youthful like herself except for the older dame who accompanied them, according to their custom. They wore finely woven cotton garments, embroidered and painted in bright colors, and Tecuichpo's neck and hair were hung with flowers.

Montezuma smiled as he greeted his daughter. Her attendants moved back beneath the branches of a hoary cypress where their bright raiment was as brilliant as the feathers of the parrots who chattered above their heads.

Guatemozin greeted his young bride and then stood aside that father and daughter might talk unheard.

"Go back to your game, my son," commanded Montezuma kindly, his anger quite forgotten. "I have need of your wife's company this morning."

And Tecuichpo at his side, the Emperor turned down another lane that wound round again towards the palace.

"Are you happy, my little one?" he asked tenderly.

"Yea, my father," she answered, "very happy. The gods are good to Anahuac and to the family of Montezuma."

As they came to the palace Montezuma took a signet ring from his finger and gave it to Ahuitzotl. The boy ran swiftly through the carved pillars of the doorway, and before the monarch and Tecuichpo reached it a high official had hurried to meet them. Then he preceded them down corridors to a chamber Tecuichpo had never entered, though her childish curiosity had often been excited by what she had heard of it. Its walls were plain without hangings; there were no furnishings save a large plain heavy wooden table, one cushioned stool directly behind it, upon which Montezuma seated himself, and a cushion that the page had brought in for her. At Montezuma's gesture, Ahuitzotl left the chamber, closing the door behind him. Then the treasurer walked to the corner of the room and touching a stone in the floor which, to Tecuichpo's amazement, moved easily to one side, he descended some steps that were un-

covered, and disappeared from view. In a minute he returned with a large box under his arm and placed it on the table; he descended and twice again returned with other boxes. At another signal from his master he opened them.

"Come here, Bright Eyes," called Montezuma, smiling with pleasure at her astonishment.

The room was suddenly ablaze with color and glistening with gold. All the cunning of Anahuac's famous goldsmiths and jewel-workers was here displayed. There were chains of gold and precious stones, nose rings and ear-rings, delicately fashioned tiny birds for ornaments, with alternate scales of gold and silver, brooches of inlay and bracelets that were so heavy that they weighed down the hand.

"Do you like them?" asked her father. "If you could choose which should it be?"

After a moment's hesitation, she replied:

"I would choose that chain of emeralds, just the color of Maztla's breast."

"In truth you are a king's daughter," exclaimed Montezuma; "you have picked out the finest jewels of them all. But they are none too fine for Tecuichpo," and he placed the emerald chain about her neck. "And this bracelet and this girdle of turquoise," he continued as he put them into her hands, "will become you well. Montezuma's treasure-house is so rich they will never be missed."

Tecuichpo thanked him warmly. She knew without this token of his affection that she was very near his heart, the dearest of his many daughters.

The monarch enjoyed the sight of her happiness and waited

until the treasurer had carried the precious burdens down the stairs and until he had replaced the stone in the pavement. Then he rose, and followed by Tecuichpo, left the chamber. The Princess could scarcely wait to show her presents to Guatemozin.

One of the Emperor's councillors was standing just without in the corridor, and when Montezuma, seeing that he had something of importance to communicate, bade him speak, he answered, bowing low:

"Lord Montezuma, there is news of the greatest moment fit for your ear alone."

Montezuma sent the willing Tecuichpo off to show her treasures and turned to his councillor.

"What has happened?" he asked.

"It is strange news I have for you, oh my Lord," answered the noble whose tense bearing and features testified to his agitation, "tidings which have just been brought by a runner from the seacoast. He has a tale to tell which may scarce be believed, of sights which he says he has seen with his own eyes—of strange men who have come no one knows whence or with what purpose. You who are the wisdom of your people, will you listen to his words and judge whether he speaks the truth?"

"Bid the courier be brought to me in the council-room, Ahuitzotl," commanded his master, turning to the page who had stood some paces away, out of hearing. Then Montezuma went directly to the hall of audience.

As soon as he was seated on the throne, the courier was admitted. He had come the seventy leagues from the eastern borders of the realm in two days. He bore with him, he said,

a picture-writing sent by the Cacique so that his dread sovereign would not think that the marvels he had to report were the words of a madman.

"Speak!" commanded Montezuma, "and then the pictures shall confirm your message."

The courier began.

"Great Lord Montezuma, it was three days gone that some fishermen set out to fish on the Eastern Sea. We who were idling in the shade on the shore watched them till their boat was out of sight. An hour later, it may be, we beheld them returning, their boat flying over the water as if a hurricane were behind them. They sprang to the strand, no fish in their baskets, and they cried out words that, though they were indeed those of our own tongue, we could not comprehend. They pointed seaward, and then our eyes too beheld what their eyes had seen."

The monarch and his councillors were all attention.

"What did you behold?" questioned Montezuma.

"We saw," answered the courier, after he had humbly saluted his sovereign, "we saw what seemed to be great houses in the water, and white wings, bigger than those of the mightiest eagle that flies over Popocatepetl, were attached to them. We cried out at the strange sight, each of us thinking that perhaps he had drunk too much pulque and therefore could not see aright. The houses with wings moved swiftly, swifter than a boat with strong rowers. They came near to the shore and then stopped, and we beheld men within them. After a while little boats left the houses, and when they reached the strand men jumped from them. But such men!"

He stopped as if to recall in all its keenness his first impression of these strangers, forgetting almost before whom he stood.

"Oh! Lord Montezuma," he cried out, "never has any man living beheld such men as these be. They are not even dark as other men whom the gods have made; their faces and hands are *white,* the color of maize kernels."

"White!" exclaimed Montezuma, in astonishment. Then he commanded:

"Continue."

"These men," said the courier, "came from their floating houses until there were hundreds on the sand, and if I should talk forever, I could not make you see how strange was their appearance and how wonderful their garb and ways. The picture-writing that the Cacique Teuhtlile sent you will tell better than my tongue."

Montezuma nodded to a councillor to open the scroll before him. There it was, all writ so that the Emperor could see for himself. Montezuma followed it eagerly, picture by picture: the strange water-houses, the curiously garbed white-faced men on the beach, and, most marvellous of all, some beasts on which they sat astride, animals such as had never been seen or heard of since the world began, bigger even than jaguars.

When Montezuma had examined the writing again and again and noted the dots and little flags beneath the pictures which told him the number of the strangers, he passed it on to the councillors, and sat silent, lost in thought.

"White!" he exclaimed to himself, "men with white faces! Can it be that the old prophecy is to be fulfilled?"

Then rousing himself, he commanded:

"Send to Tenochitlan for the High Priest."

The slave who was setting forth to the city in search of the priest met him at the foot of the hill at Chapultepec. Strange rumors were abroad in the city and the priest had hastened to the summer palace to verify them. When he entered the throne-room Montezuma cried out:

"Servant of the Gods, it may be that my memory has lost what once I learned from you when as a youth I too served in the temples; speak therefore and tell us of the passing of Quetzalcoatl and of his coming again."

The High Priest looked about and tried to understand what the story of a god could have to do with the present moment. But he could not question the sovereign's will, so speaking in a slow, measured tone, as if praying, he began:

"You know, great Montezuma, that Quetzalcoatl is the God of the Air; that for many years he dwelt in Anahuac and that the earth smiled ever at his presence and brought forth fruit and flowers, and that no man had to labor. Not as now grew the maize, the size of a man's hand; but one ear then was the weight of two strong men. No need was there of the swinging of sweet incense; all the air was perfumed by his breath. And Quetzalcoatl taught men how to live together, not each alone in a den as the beasts of the fields. He instructed them in the art of ruling and how to take metals from the bowels of the earth and how to fashion them for their needs. There was no lack of food in all the land, no man went hungry, no woman wept, and no child died an untimely death while Quetzalcoatl abode amongst us."

"Thus too did my memory speak to me," confirmed Montezuma.

"Then," continued the High Priest, "Quetzalcoatl left us, since the other gods were jealous of him. When he passed tornadoes swept the land, leaving it barren; there was famine and disease and men and women labored and suffered that they and their children might not die. Quetzalcoatl passed on to the Eastern Sea and entered into his magic boat of serpent skin. Tall he was beyond the stature of men as he stood there bidding farewell to his followers, and bearded as none other of gods or men, and his face was white as the pale magnolia flower. 'I sail for the Isle of Tlapallan,' he spake—to that magic isle which lies we know not where—'but I will return some day to Anahuac, I and my people, to bless the land.' Thus spake Quetzalcoatl as he departed."

The High Priest ceased and gazed in amazement at the expression he beheld on all the faces of those about him. Montezuma handed him the picture-writing, saying:

"These strangers that have landed on the eastern coast have white faces, as you may see, and are bearded. Speak and tell me, is then the prophecy fulfilled and come they in truth from Quetzalcoatl?"

CHAPTER V

The Founding of Vera Cruz

THE week of inaction that followed the excitement of the landing tried to the utmost the soul of Hernando Cortes. The old tales of chivalry came to his mind and he thought of himself as a knight who, having blown the horn before the castle of a powerful prince or fearful giant, must wait for him to come forth, whether as friend or foe no one could foretell.

"Ask the woman how long a journey it is to the city where Montezuma dwells," he said again and again to Aguilar when there was still no news of the envoy's returning; and Aguilar, after consulting Marina, would reply that the road to the capital was a long and a difficult one.

There was nothing to do while he waited impatiently but drill his men, and this Cortes did each day in the cooler hours at sunrise and after sunset. It was a curiously mixed assemblage, this expedition that had set forth from Cuba. Vastly different were the impulses which had moved the different men to embark on it. There were planters of Cuban estates which had been given them by the Crown, who looked for no more

in this new land than to secure more acres to plant and more slaves to work them; there were rough men of low birth and hidalgos (Spanish nobles) of ancient names equally stirred at the prospect of winning immeasurable fortunes. Others there were, young men who had never fought in any contest more important than skirmishes with the Indians of Cuba, and veteran warriors who had won their spurs before the walls of Granada in the armies of Ferdinand and Isabella, who hoped for more glory to be won here, who believed that the career of arms was the only one fit for those of gentle birth. And each of them, hidalgo, gambler, ruffian and youthful adventurer, was convinced that his purpose was ennobled by the Cross he helped bear into a pagan land.

During the long days of his waiting, as he lay on the mats sheltered from the fierce sun by the hut covered with green boughs, or strolled alone in the cooler hours along the beach, Cortes came to realize that as yet he possessed no army—only the material from which an army might be made. In his haste to set sail from Cuba before Velasquez could detain him, he had thought only of getting together enough men and materials. In the fighting at Cozumel and at Tabasco, with the insight of a born commander, he had seen what discipline would be needed to weld these adventurers into an army fit for his great purpose.

"And I can do it!" he exclaimed aloud the seventh evening after the departure of the courier. "I can forge them into a body that no army has surpassed since the old Roman legions. But," he added thoughtfully, "will it be large enough?"

Day by day new reports of the great extent of the kingdom and of the power of Montezuma were brought to him by the

natives who came to the camp with food or to barter with the Spaniards for trifles valuable in their eyes because of their strangeness. To a prudent man the very idea that dwelt in Cortes's brain would have seemed madness; but no friend nor foe of Cortes had ever called him prudent.

Fernando had been quick to learn his duties as a page. He had already found that his master's temper was often quick, but that he was just and generous. Gratitude that he had allowed him to take part in the expedition and devotion to his person made his service a pleasure.

On the eighth day Fernando rushed into Cortes's hut and called out:

"Señor, the ambassadors have arrived, and there are scores of men weighted like sumpter mules under the presents sent you by their king. Hasten, Señor, I pray. I would fain behold what they may be."

Cortes smiled at the boy's excitement, but his own was scarcely less keen. He hastily summoned Marina, and she informed him that the two ambassadors who were approaching with the governor were two high Aztec nobles.

"Master," cried Fernando eagerly, "look, look at him who comes first and tell me what you see."

Cortes gazed at the Aztec, then he turned a puzzled glance at Alvarado, who stood behind him.

"Has the sun confused my sight?" he queried.

"Nay, Captain, that brown chief save for his color is as much like you as if he were your twin brother. I would he might put him into your garments and you into his."

And every Spaniard noted the resemblance. They learned

later that the Aztec, a Cacique called Cacama, had been specially chosen by Montezuma as an envoy on account of his likeness to the face of the white chief as it had appeared on the wonderfully accurate picture-writing.

After saluting the Spaniards the ambassadors ordered their slaves to spread out on the mats the treasures sent by their monarch. The eyes of the Europeans glistened as they saw shields, helmets and breastplates covered with thin plates of gold, ornaments of gold, fans of bright featherwork, precious stones and robes and coverlets of the finest cotton. They saw also the helmet sent by Cortes to Montezuma now returned filled with gold dust, and there were also circular plates of gold and silver.

"The finest craftsmen of Seville have never wrought as delicate work as this," whispered Alvarado to Sandoval as he examined an intricately fashioned chain.

Though these treasures surpassed Cortes's hopes, he turned from them eagerly to hear the messages of Montezuma.

"It has given our master great pleasure," spake the ambassadors gravely, "to hold this communication with the King of Spain, for whom he feels the most profound respect. He greatly regrets that he cannot enjoy a personal interview with you, but the distance of his capital is too great, and indeed the journey is beset with difficulties and with too many dangers from formidable enemies to make it possible. Therefore he sends these tokens of his friendly disposition that you may not delay in returning to your own land."

"It appears that Montezuma does not desire us greatly as guests, Captain," said Alvarado when the ambassadors had de-

parted. "And even though you did send him word again that no distance nor dangers would keep you away, I do believe he does not intend that you should ever make the journey to his city."

"Nevertheless, we shall go thither," answered Cortes briefly.

Though he spoke in a tone as confident as one in which he might say that on the morrow he would rise and eat, when he was alone Cortes asked himself *how* this thing should be done. He knew that the country was prosperous—that he could judge by the products brought into camp—and that there was a dense population, and warlike, if Marina's information were to be relied on. To oppose to all this he had only a few hundred men. Never, except in the fairy stories he had heard as a child, of a prince who killed dragons singlehanded, had there been so foolhardy an exploit as the one he intended to undertake.

To distract the men, made querulous and discontented by idleness, Cortes welcomed the chance for action which soon arrived.

Into the camp one day had come five Indians whose garments and features were different from those of the Aztecs with which the Spaniards were familiar. They came, they said, from Cempoalla, and they said that their country which bordered the great sea to the northward had been conquered years before by the Aztecs. Word had reached them of the landing of the strangers, and they were curious to see the white men and eager to have them visit their country. Cortes promised that he would come shortly.

But first a more important matter sprang up to claim his

attention. Cortes was aware that among the adventurers were many men who were either openly or secretly the partisans of Velasquez, Governor of Cuba. During the excitement of the landing and on account of their eagerness for gold, he had found them willing to submit to his leadership; yet he had known that they were plotting against him in secret. Now that they had attained their object and had received their portions of the treasure, they were eager to return to Cuba, some because they were content with what they had gained, and a few more timid natures, because they feared Velasquez' enmity and the harm he might do to their Cuban property if they took the side of Cortes against him. The bolder spirits, among them Sandoval, Alvarado, Christoval de Olid, Puertocarrero and de Avila, feared that Cortes might be influenced to submit to their desire and return to Cuba. So those who had been notified in whispers of the meeting, strolled one by one after nightfall to the hut of Cortes. They stationed Fernando outside to guard against interruption and eavesdropping.

"We are not minded, Señor," began de Olid after Cortes had welcomed them and begged them to be seated, "to turn our backs on the very gate of this enchanted land nor to carry home a mere handful of treasure when we may return with a bagful."

"And how shall you get that?" asked Cortes; "it will not fall into the bag for the asking."

"By the points of our good swords," cried Puertocarrero, striking his own scabbard with his fist.

"This is no Cuba, to be won easily, and these warriors are

no fearful Cuban Indians," said Cortes, speaking deliberately.

"But we be Spaniards," retorted de Avila proudly.

"Even St. Michael and the rest of the archangels could not subdue Satan and his hosts without a struggle," replied Cortes, stroking his beard.

At this speech the hidalgos glanced at each other as if to try and read whether their companions' thoughts were the same as their own. Then Alvarado spoke angrily:

"And so Hernando Cortes fears for his skin and turns his back on a glorious adventure. Indeed Velasquez judged rightly when he desired to entrust the expedition to another."

Cortes's eyes flashed, but it was in a calm voice that he asked:

"And shall I defy lawful authority by refusing to return now to Cuba?"

"Velasquez exceeds his authority," said de Avila. "It is in the name of the King of Spain that we set forth. Let us appeal to our sovereign to judge between us and the Governor of Cuba, and in the meantime let us continue our work here."

Had the light been brighter in the hut a close observer might have beheld a smile of triumph flit across Cortes's lips.

"Yes, we will stay," cried one, and there was a general outcry from his companions, "we will stay, we will stay," till Fernando ran inside to warn them that their voices might carry to nearby tents.

"Yea! we will remain," said de Olid, speaking more quietly, "but we will choose another leader than Cortes, who is too"—

"Stop!" cried Cortes, rising. "Stop, before words pass your lips that your blood would needs wipe out. Harken, gentle-

men, I crave your pardon for my silence, but it was of design that I allowed you to misunderstand me. I but desired to test your spirits, to learn whether in truth you were minded to dare dangers here from Indians and dangers in Cuba from Velasquez."

"Then you will stay?" questioned Sandoval eagerly, who had not spoken before.

"Stay?" exclaimed Cortes. "I would not leave this land until we have won it more than a hungry lion would leave the deer beneath its paws. Stay, Gonsalvo? If I were the only Spaniard left I would win this kingdom singlehanded!"

He spoke boastfully, but his very exaggeration brought relief to his followers. They surrounded him, laughing, joking, begging his pardon for having misjudged him, and Cortes laid aside the stern manner he had assumed for his purpose and was again the comrade of them all.

"And now," asked Puertocarrero, "how will you deal with the partisans of Velasquez? Bid us make prisoners of them this night. It will be better to lessen our force till it be all of one mind."

"Have you never heard, friend," asked Cortes, "the old fable of the Wind and the Sun? Each wagered that he would make a way-farer lay aside his cloak. So the Wind blew his fiercest, but the man only drew the folds closer about him. Then the Sun cast his warm beams upon him and the man quickly threw his cloak aside."

Cortes ceased, then after a pause bowed to his guests, saying "Señors, I shall play the Sun."

Though Fernando had guarded the hut faithfully, rumors

of that night's council had somehow spread throughout the camp. On the following day a group of Velasquez' partisans approached Cortes after he had watched the daily drill of the soldiers on the shore and had seen the horses led back to their stalls after their exercise. There were so many of them that their comrades' presence made each bold, and they burst out with their complaints that Cortes's intention to stay longer in the land was sheer rebellion against the lawful authority of the Governor of Cuba. They spoke sharply; and those who knew Cortes's proud nature looked for his anger to flash out. Instead, he smiled at the deputation and said:

"Señors, nothing is further from my desire than to exceed my instructions. I should indeed willingly remain in this land and by peaceful intercourse with the natives increase the treasure we have already amassed for our sovereign and for ourselves. But since my comrades think otherwise, I will defer to their opinion and I will give orders to embark at once on board the fleet and to set sail again for Cuba."

This speech was received with astonishment from both parties.

"He has betrayed us," cried out Alvarado, and others echoed him. But Sandoval went among his furious companions, whispering "Remember, he told us that he would play the Sun."

And de Olid, noting the dismayed glances of many of Velasquez' friends, said to Sandoval and Alvarado:

"Cortes is right, see, they have got more than they wished for. Now they regret to leave the rich land. Their hands are beginning to itch for more gold."

And de Olid was right. After thinking it over and after overcoming a certain awkwardness in approaching the subject, a deputation composed of both parties sought Cortes the following day and protested that he should not set sail. It was necessary, they urged, to plant a colony here whose duty it would be to watch over the interests of the sovereign of Spain.

And Cortes, still playing a part, pretended that it was with great reluctance that he allowed himself to be convinced.

"There is no one," he said, "more deeply devoted than myself to the welfare of my sovereign and to the glory of the Spanish name. Not only have I expended my all, but you know that I have incurred heavy debts to meet the charges of this expedition and I had hoped to repay myself by continuing our traffic with these Mexicans. But I am willing to abide by the decision of my soldiers, to go or to stay."

And the crowd cried out, "Stay!"

"Then," continued Cortes, "that no one may say hereafter that Hernando Cortes acted for his own advantage and against lawful authority, I will settle this colony in the name of our Sovereign, King Charles, and I will appoint a magistracy to preside over it."

The soldiers cheered loudly, and cheered again when Cortes appointed as civil magistrates Puertocarrero and Montijo. The former was a faithful friend of Cortes, and the latter had been one of the most ardent adherents of Velasquez, so that his choice satisfied both parties. The other lesser officials were chosen; then it became necessary to find a name for the Spanish town to be built upon the land now covered by the huts of the camp.

"Let it be 'Villa Rica,'" suggested Cortes, "for it will be a 'rich city.'"

"And since it was on Good Friday, the blessed day of our Lord's Agony, that we landed here," said Father Olmedo, "let us add 'De Vera Cruz,' of the 'Holy Cross.'"

"So be it," assented Cortes; "Villa Rica de Vera Cruz is the name of this new town, and may it ever prosper."

Later Cortes, still playing the part of the Sun which conciliates instead of exciting opposition, appeared before the newly chosen magistrates and resigned to them his office as Captain General.

"This office," he said, "has expired, since it is now superseded by that of the civil authority of the magistrates of Villa Rica de Vera Cruz." He then walked quietly out from the large pavilion where the magistrates had assembled, back to his own hut.

"I am no longer the head of this expedition, Fernando," he said as he sank down on the mats, glad to escape the heat and dust without.

But Fernando, familiar with his master's manner, could see that he was not discontented.

And in truth it was not long before a messenger from the magistrates commanded his presence. When Cortes had once again buckled on his sword and returned to them, they announced that after solemn deliberation they had found no one so suited as himself to take charge of the interests of the community and, therefore, in the name of their sovereign they appointed him, Hernando Cortes, Captain General and Chief Justice of the colony.

Cheers went up from the soldiers at this news. It was, however, not long before the adherents of Velasquez began to murmur:

"It's a fine trick he has played us! He caught us napping with his smooth-mouthed treachery! We were fools to listen to his words, fools almost as great as those silly creatures who think that he will lead them to their fortunes instead of into their graves! But let Cortes beware; we shall get the better of him yet."

Fernando, who had not been near enough to hear their words, knew from their angry gestures that they were threatening his master. He ran to one of the older soldiers and told him of his fears. Nothing loath to a quarrel, the soldier shouted to his comrades, and they all made for the spot where the disgruntled Velasquez men were planning their next step.

"Traitors!" they cried. "We know the language of your scowls and shaken fists. If you have any words to utter against Cortes or against us out with them and your swords too."

Immediately the fight was on, a little sooner and more openly than the Velasquez faction liked. They would have preferred a more secret attack.

The fight had not lasted long before Cortes came out to learn the meaning of the noise.

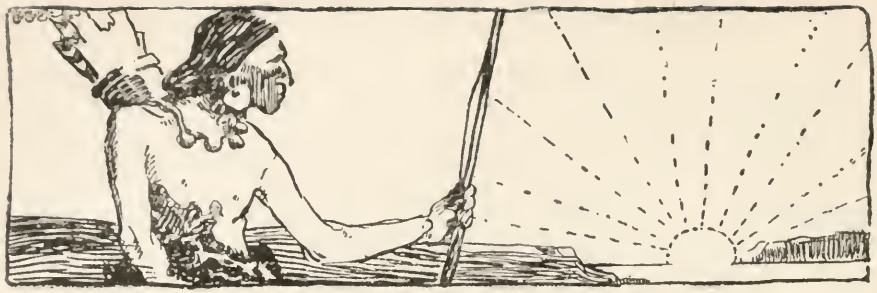
"What is the cause of this?" he questioned sternly.

The Velasquez partisans saw that they had gone too far to cover up their intentions and therefore did not attempt to hide from Cortes their soreness at what they called his falseness. Cortes no longer felt the need of conciliating them. His au-

thority was now firmly established and he determined to make use of it.

"Since you have chosen me legally and with respect to Spanish custom, I will rule you, whether you will or no. And those who disobey or incite to rebellion against me will wish they had never laid eyes upon Hernando Cortes. Bind those men," he commanded his loyal soldiers, "and put them in irons on board the ships."

The ringleaders were soon led off to imprisonment, and the wavering were sent off on a foraging expedition under Alvarado's keen eyes, so that they could find no chance of doing further harm.



CHAPTER VI

Cortes Finds Allies

NOW that those of the Velasquez faction had been overawed or won over, Cortes was eager to pay the promised visit to the Cacique of Cempoalla. He sent one of the ships to explore the coast while he himself commanded the troops that followed the shore northward into the country of the Totonacs.

So wearied were the eyes of the Spaniards of the low monotonous land surrounding Vera Cruz, that they cried out with delight at the first sign of a more varied landscape. The plains began to slope up into hills that were covered with trees, shrubs and vines undreamed of in Europe, and even many that were new to those familiar with the tropical groves of Cuba. Fruits were there for the picking; and Cortes, always glad to indulge his men when it was not at the expense of discipline, set the march at an easy pace and one that had many haltings.

The men were like children let out of school. They examined eagerly everything that was novel: some who had come almost direct from Spain, hearing from their comrades who

had been longer in the Indies that the low hanging clusters of bananas were good to eat, plucked them and bit into them, skin and all, to the amusement of their more sophisticated companions. Others tried to catch the brightly colored parrots and other birds that whistled and called from the branches above them, or wondered at the strange animals they beheld—the armadillo, for instance, "like a Swiss lanzknecht in his armour," declared Sandoval.

Everyone kept running to Marina to ask questions: what was the name of that strange horned lizard? Was this berry good to eat? Was that gold that glittered in the sands of the shallow stream through which they waded, and were there lions and bears in the dense forests surrounding them? And Marina, who had already picked up a fair knowledge of Spanish, answered each one, or when she could not understand them or had not the terms to reply in, would smile and do her best.

"Surely this is a land of enchantment," said de Olid to Cortes as they rested at noon beneath a palm tree. "The wizards set the sandy ugly coast as a barrier to dishearten knights in search of adventure."

"And who knows what new marvels lie still ahead of us," suggested Cortes. "In truth, since the days of the Crusades no man in Europe has wrought such deeds as await us, nor have his eyes beheld what we shall behold. It is as if in this New Spain of the Western Seas a spring of new blossoms were waiting man wearied of the winter monotony of existence in Europe. Is it not a very wonder that stirs the spirit to its depths that we cannot foresee nor even so much as imagine what each day shall bring forth? We rise up in the morn

not as in Spain, saying, 'To-day will I eat this, wear this, go hither, behold plains, cities, rivers, mountains, and meet with men and women who look as men and women have looked since the world began.' Nay, here it may be that men shall have one eye set in the middle of the forehead or walk upon their hands; the land, for all we know, may be paved with silver, and in place of trees there may be strange beasts upholding the sky upon their shoulders. Everything is possible," he continued, his eyes sparkling, "it is the great Unknown that awaits us, and no man has ever led such a quest as I lead."

"You are eloquent indeed, Captain," admitted de Olid. "Yet I confess 'tis not so much the Unknown that draws me as the *known* gold in the land, to be won by a few sharp blows of my blade that has served me faithfully since it first drew Moorish blood before Granada's walls."

"Your few blows may grow to many," said Cortes, his expression changing to one of thoughtfulness. "Marina tells me that Montezuma's troops are as numerous as the stalks in yonder far off field of maize, as they call the plant, or as the flocks of that strange peacock-like fowl she calls turkey."

But de Olid's fancy was not one that saw difficulties in advance, nor did he experience the anxiety of a commander.

The next day, after passing through thick forests where prickly-pear trees and trees of liquid amber and cocoas and other palms shaded the way for leagues, the Spaniards came upon several deserted villages. They judged that the inhabitants, having learned through some mysterious source of their approach, had flown from their homes in fear of the strangers. They examined the houses curiously and searched for treas-

ures, but Cortes issued strict orders that there should be no pillaging.

At the second village Cortes found awaiting him Alvarado, who had been sent ahead with an advance guard.

"Señor!" cried his lieutenant, "we have beheld such a sight as no white man has ever seen before. It has turned my soldier's stomach till it is no stronger than a woman's."

Cortes, followed by his officers, let Alvarado lead him to the temple. It was built pyramid-shape, with a flight of wide steps up the front, and its top was a square on which stood images of horrible gods wrought in dark stone. And there was another stone also—the Stone of Sacrifice—and on this and on the stone pavement upon which it rested lay human bodies, a hole gaping in each where once the man's heart had beat.

"Human sacrifices!" cried Cortes; " 'tis indeed a most gruesome sight. Truly the Lord has directed our coming to this land, that we may show these benighted paynims the error of their ways and awaken their souls to our blessed faith."

Fernando, who but the year before had been a child cared for by nurses, shivered at the sight, and tears sprang to his eyes. Yet the place had an awful attraction for him, and he listened eagerly while Marina explained that in every temple throughout the land hundreds of human victims were sacrificed each year and their hearts, torn from their living bodies, were lifted up as the most pleasing of offerings to the gods.

The following day they neared Cempoalla, and as they approached thousands of men and women of the Totonac race came forth to welcome them. They threw about the necks of

the Spaniards circlets of flowers and offered to them fruit and drink which they carried in woven baskets and brilliantly decorated earthenware vessels. The Spaniards were interested in noting the difference between the Cempoallans and the Indians near Vera Cruz. All, men and women, wore garments of cotton brightly colored and the men, in addition, wore capes over their shoulders and sashes about their waist.

The city to which they were escorted was a large one surrounded by orchards and gardens; the houses were well built and covered with stucco that glistened so brightly in the sunshine that some of the Spaniards, expectant of all wonders, called out that the walls were made of silver. The Cacique, who overtopped all of his own people and most of the Spaniards also, welcomed Cortes with great courtesy, and placed at the disposal of his visitors numerous apartments opening out of a great courtyard.

Though Cortes had no reason to doubt the friendliness of the Totonacs, nevertheless he did not relax any of his precautions. Guards were stationed and the rounds made as regularly as if they were in a hostile country.

At the formal reception by the Cacique Marina accompanied Cortes and translated the speech of each leader to the other. Cortes said that he had come to the land to bring to Montezuma the message of his own sovereign and to overthrow the worship of idols and to teach the faith of those who worshipped the Christian God.

"The gods send us sunshine and rain," answered the Cacique; "we desire no better ones."

He spoke of Montezuma and of his great power, of how

the Totonacs, akin to the Aztecs, had been conquered by them, and how merciless were their conquerors, how they exacted large tribute and, should the Totonacs dream of resisting, how their young men and women would be borne away to Tenochtitlan to be offered up there as sacrifices in the temples. He added, when Cortes questioned, that there were other parts of the kingdom which were also oppressed, but he said:

"How should we revolt more than the shore might revolt against the sea? Montezuma's armies would overwhelm us as the waves cover the sand, and we should be no more."

During this interview the thoughts of Cortes had been racing through his brain. No possible difficulties, no certain dangers confronting them had made him hesitate a moment in his design to advance on Montezuma's capital. But daily, hourly, his mind had been seeking the way, the method by which he might lead safely his few hundred men against the hosts that would probably seek to bar him. Now at last he saw the way! Dissension and rebellion in the land itself should be his aid. He would use to the utmost the enemies Montezuma's harshness had made in his own realm.

Cortes talked eloquently with the Cacique while his men were being feasted. "A single Spaniard," he boasted, "is worth a host of Aztecs"; and at last his words and the awe of the white man conquered the Cacique's fears and he agreed to assist the Spaniards in their undertaking.

It was not long before he was called upon to keep his word. Cortes, eager to explore the land still further, had marched along the coast to the town of Chiahuitzlan, where the Cacique joined him. While they were greeting each other a stream of

people began to surge into the wide market place, sullenness and dismay painted on their features. Five men in richer garb than was worn by any of the Totonacs strode through the crowd bearing wands in their hands, and slaves with fans brushed the flies away from them.

"By St. James!" cried Alvarado to Sandoval, "did you ever see such overwhelming pride? · The King of Castile bears himself more humbly."

He noticed that Marina, standing behind Cortes, was trembling, and he pointed her out to his commander.

"Speak," ordered Cortes. "Who are these men and why do you tremble, and why greets them the Cacique so humbly?"

"They are Aztec chieftains," she answered in a low voice, hiding her head in her scarf. "They are come to collect tribute for Montezuma, and no man in all the land dare refuse aught to one who beareth a wand. And he who wears that chain of little gold rabbits, he it was who used to come for tribute to the village where I was born. His servant it is to whom my mother sold me as a slave, and he in turn sold me again to the Tabascans."

There was a great silence in the market place; then in a loud voice one of the Aztecs spoke, saying that Montezuma's displeasure had been roused by the actions of the Totonacs because they had welcomed the white strangers without his permission. Therefore, in addition to the tribute due, they should send twenty youths and maidens to Tenochtitlan for sacrifice in the temples.

There was weeping and sobbing, and many a mother sought

to cover her daughter with her skirt, and many a father threw his cape over his son's head.

"Quick! Marina," commanded Cortes as soon as she had translated this speech, "tell the Cacique of Cempoalla that now the hour has come to cast off the hated yoke of the Aztecs. Tell him to seize and bind these proud nobles, and together we will face Montezuma's wrath."

Marina trembled still. The fear of the power of her dread sovereign had returned in all its old force. Yet already her heart had gone out to the Spaniards, to these men who spoke of doing what no mere human being might accomplish. She believed in them and in their powers, yet for a moment she hesitated. Then bravely in a firm loud voice she transmitted Cortes's message.

The Cacique too hesitated. Which side should he choose; which would prove the stronger? Dared he revolt against the Lord of Anahuac, whose vengeance would be so frightful? But at last Cortes prevailed against his fears, and he gave the command. His guard flung themselves upon the tax collectors, bound them hand and foot and bore them off to prison, while the populace cried out in frenzied joy or shook their heads questioningly.

Though it was from policy that these tax collectors were freed later on and sent back to Montezuma, the news that their Cacique, aided by the Spaniards, had defied the authority of Montezuma spread rapidly throughout the entire country of the Totonacs. Everywhere, in towns, villages and in the fields, it was talked about with fear or hope, fear of the Aztec vengeance and hope that at last the chance had come to win inde-

pendence. It was too late to back out now even if they would, and all the chiefs of the Totonacs swore to help the Spaniards to the utmost.

Now that these valuable allies had been won, Cortes and his small force returned to Vera Cruz. During their absence a ship from Cuba had arrived with twelve soldiers and two horses. The newcomers brought word that Velasquez planned to send a new expedition to Mexico to interfere with Cortes's undertaking.

"I'll cut them down as they land on the beach," cried Sandoval angrily.

"The better way would be to prevent their coming at all," replied Cortes, who however smiled at Sandoval, pleased at the youth's enthusiastic loyalty.

"And how, Captain, may that be brought about?" questioned Puertocarrero as they sat at sundown on the sand, waving fans brought from Cempoalla to set the heavy air in motion.

"Who is the superior of Velasquez?" asked Cortes, unbuckling his heavy sword and handing it to Fernando.

"The Governor of Hispaniola?" asked de Olid.

"Higher than that, Cristoval," said Cortes, "higher even than the Council of the Indies in Spain. I mean our gracious Sovereign, King Charles of Castile and Aragon, and now also Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. We will appeal to him to confer upon us full authority to explore this land. Then Velasquez can no more act against us than yon fish there can live now that the wave hath cast it high and dry."

They discussed the best means of doing this, and Cortes

wrote a long letter to the King, setting forth all that had already been accomplished and all that he hoped to do. The royal fifth of the treasure was to be sent with the letter by ship to Spain; but Cortes, who desired to overwhelm Spain by the sight of the riches won and thus make the King eager to gain more, put a suggestion to his officers that they should all give up their portions of the gold and jewels and send them as a gift to the King. Then the soldiers were told what their leaders were doing and that by this gift they would likely gain favor from their Sovereign. They, too, they were told, might contribute if they liked, but it was left to each to decide himself whether he would make a present sacrifice for a possible gain in the future. All of them brought forward the treasures they had gloated over and delivered them up more or less willingly.

It may be that the suggestion to contribute their hoarded gold seemed too much like a command. At all events, it helped inflame the minds of some of the soldiers against Cortes; and they added this wrong, as they termed it, to the other wrongs they counted up against him.

One day Fernando was so careless in his manner of serving his master, dropping his sword and casque and spilling wine from the goblet upon his doublet, that Cortes glanced up to observe the lad. He noticed that Fernando seemed eager to speak, but he did not question him until the officers who had dined with him left the pavilion.

"What is it, boy?" he asked. "Tell me before your secret makes you wreak yet more damage to me and to my apparel."

Then Fernando related how the night before when he had come up from bathing in the gulf, he had approached unseen a

number of soldiers sitting together in the darkness, well away from the rest of the camp. They had set a sentry between them and the tents, but had not expected that any one would come upon them from the water side.

"They were plotting against you, Señor," said the boy in an awestruck tone. "They fear you and they fear this land of wonders and strange dangers, and so they have taken one of the ships and stored provisions aboard and will sail her back to Cuba and join your enemies there. 'Tis tonight they intend to sail. The priest, Juan Diaz, and Escudero are the leaders."

Cortes wasted no words in further questions, but began issuing orders. Even as the conspirators were stealing down to the beach where the vessel would have weighed her anchor an hour later, they were seized and carried away to be judged and sentenced.

But though Cortes had dealt successfully with two revolts, he realized that in order to prevent others in the future he must take some step that would bind the entire expedition more closely together. He thought long over this matter, and then talked it over with several of his officers.

Fernando was sent with secret messages to the captains and pilots of the ships, and soon they returned a report in which they laid before the Captain General the information that the severe storms which had been raging had so strained the timbers of their vessels that they were no longer seaworthy.

When Cortes heard this report he exclaimed:

"If it be so we must make the best of it. Heaven's will be done."

He ordered all the sails and spars and stores to be taken off the ships and stored at Vera Cruz and then he commanded that all the vessels be burned. There was a terrible outcry among the troops when this news was made known and some of the men declared that he had betrayed them and taken away all means of escape from the land where he meant them to perish. But Cortes looked calmly on when they crowded about him, crying and gesticulating angrily. He waited until their voices were hoarse with their shoutings, then he began to speak.

He praised their bravery and recalled what they had already accomplished, and he promised them victory in the future and innumerable spoils.

"But," he called out when the loud cries had dwindled to occasional murmurs, "there is yet one vessel left. They who fear may sail on her to Cuba."

He paused and waited for an answer, but no man stepped forward. Instead their leader's eloquence had inspired them. They forgot their grievances, and thought only of the glory and spoils they would take home with them some day. Tossing caps into the air, they cried:

"To Mexico City! On to Mexico!"

By this desperate deed Cortes had indeed made the fate of one the fate of them all. There they now stood in a strange land which they must conquer or wherein they must perish. And the hearts of the brave Spaniards rose to meet the great adventure.

CHAPTER VII

The Beginning of the March

WHILE Cortes, his army increased by the three thousand Cempoallan allies, was marching towards the borders of the Republic of Tlascala, the streets and council palace of its capital city were noisy with the shouted opinions of its populace and councillors.

News of the westward march of the whitefaced strangers ever since they set out from Vera Cruz had reached the city daily, and in the market place even bargaining for food or pottery vessels for which the land was famous had lost interest for the folk, now that there was the chance that these mysterious strangers might try to invade their land which lay on the route to Tenochtitlan. Discussions as to this possibility grew so vehement that the police, upon whose efficiency the four-quartered city prided itself, had to interfere several times to restore quiet among the disputants.

Then when the four Cempoallan envoys arrived, bearing as a sign of their embassy from the Spaniards a token of numberless black marks upon white paper which, unlike their own picture-writing, could not be solved even by the priests, it was

learned that the Spaniards asked thereby, and through the words of their allies and envoys, for permission to traverse Tlascala on their way to Montezuma's capital, and the uproar and the expression of divers opinions increased.

Within the council-hall the four Caciques who ruled Tlascala with equal authority had gathered together a large assembly composed of lesser Caciques, knights and soldiers of various grades.

The youngest of the ruling Caciques, Maxixcatzin, was the first to speak after a moment of silent deliberation.

"Brother Rulers and nobles, we have to decide this day such things as have never been discussed in all the long years since The Land of Bread (the Tlascalan meaning of the name of the country) was first settled by our forefathers. Our friends from Cempoalla have brought to us the message of the white-faced strangers who desire to pass through our borders. Let our deliberations be not too lengthy, since while we talk they approach nearer and nearer our wall."

There was a murmur of approval and the Cacique continued:

"As the youngest of us four rulers, it is my duty to speak first my opinion; then last of all our venerable Xicotencatl, beloved of the gods, will give us the weight of his experience, the fruit of his five-score years. Had we ever seen these mysterious strangrs who ask this of us, it would be easier to frame our reply. When one has looked into a man's face one knows whether he is strong or weak, and oftentimes whether he is honourable or a scoundrel. But we must judge with no knowledge of what kind of men be these who come to us or . . . even if they be men and not gods!"

At last he had voiced the thought of many a heart in the assembly. All of them knew of the prophecy of the return of Quetzalcoatl, or of his people he had promised to send back from his magic isle. Could men be men who differed as did these strangers from all that was known of human ways?

"We know not even if they be mortal," continued Maxixcatzin. "No one has seen one of them die, and 'tis said that their leaders do not even walk as men do but sit upon some creatures that resemble no beasts our land hath ever bred. If they be not gods they must be at least magicians, and we should welcome them into Tlascala, since surely gods will recompense kindness or punish revolt against them."

The next eldest Cacique rose and began to speak:

"If they were gods would they insult the statues and temples of gods as we learn they have done on their march hither? If we let them pass through our borders shall our temples be safe? And if they be not gods but men, why should Tlascala, that has ever stood proud and victorious against all her enemies, admit an army which may be that of a foe? We have not forgotten how to defend our borders."

The soldiers applauded this opinion, as the more thoughtful men in the council hall, those whose imaginations and superstitions were moved by the prophecy of the bearded white men, had applauded the opinion of Maxixcatzin.

The third Cacique, a warrior who bore the scars of many a battle with the Aztecs, whose son had been captured by them and sacrificed on the Great Teocalli in Tenochtitlan, now sprang to his feet with a lightness and quickness of movement

that would not have been expected of his seventy years. He spoke quickly also:

"Yes, we can defend our borders, but let us see that it is against foes and not friends that our wall is manned. These strangers seek Montezuma; they march against his capital whither every soul in Tlascala would march if there were but enough of us. They ask of us to be their allies. Lo! I say to all of you that the gods themselves have sent these allies—men, not gods. At last our day has come, the day for which every Tlascalan knight or noble makes ready, himself and his son, when we shall go forth against the Aztecs to conquer those who would have conquered us, the foe whose name is bitterer in our mouths than aloes. Let us bid these strangers welcome; let us hasten towards them with thanksgiving and feasting, and greet them as friends."

The deep hatred of the Aztecs and the thought that with the aid of the strangers it might be possible for Tlascala to right her ancient wrongs, swayed the Council more strongly than the words that had gone before. It remained now for the venerable Xicotencatl to speak. If he were of a like mind then not a minute would be lost in sending couriers to meet the strangers and conduct them to the city.

"It is indeed true," he began in a voice that was so low that the ears of all were strained not to miss its message, "that we would eagerly welcome a warlike ally against the Aztecs. I have lived many years in the hopes of seeing the power of our enemies weakened, but my eyes"—and he pointed a shaking finger towards his sightless eyes—"grew weary waiting for such a sight. If these white strangers are in truth foes of the

Aztecs let us join them; but would foes of Montezuma accept presents from Montezuma as these men have done?"

The point he made was recognized by the Council and men shook their heads or looked grave. The blind chief turned his head from side to side as if he were trying to discover what his listeners were thinking. Then he continued:

"We know not why these men have come from afar, but we do know the enmity of Montezuma to our land and folk. Who shall say that he has not sought out this new way of invading the land of Tlascala? Shall we let these men set foot on our sacred soil when our young warriors are eager for battle? My son, as ye know, is at the head of his troops. Let us send word swiftly and secretly to him to fall upon these strangers. If he be victorious then shall we all rejoice; if he is worsted then let us say that he acted without orders from us."

A cheer rose from the Council. The ancient Cacique who had lived for more than a century was revered as one possessing almost superhuman wisdom, and those who had argued for another course were almost all convinced by his arguments. So a messenger was bidden to seek young Xicotencatl and convey to him the command of the Republic.

It had been a long and arduous journey for the Spaniards from the hot plains of the seacoast up into the mountains where they suffered at night bitterly from the cold. The population of the towns and villages through which they passed were too curious, too awed or too politic to begin hostilities. But Cortes allowed no relaxation of discipline. There was no straggling, no laying aside of arms, even at night they must sleep in full armour. It was better to be a horse, some of the men grum-

bled, since they were unsaddled and allowed to roll about at freedom when evening came. But there was no real discontent with their captain's stern measures. His men had already caught the contagion of Cortes's enthusiasm and were willing to submit to the restraints he considered necessary.

"Yet," declared Sandoval as their horses climbed slowly up the mountain which must be crossed before they reached the borders of Tlascala, "I would that we might have some of the excitement of soldiers, since we suffer all the hardships of a soldier's life. Now I long for a sharp little contest with a foe. My blood is chilled in this hilly region, and needs a stirring."

"Perchance you will not have long to wait," Cortes consoled him. "As an old sailor feels the coming storm in his bones, so I feel an approaching conflict—but I prophesy not how soon."

A moment later Cortes and his lieutenants who rode in the van gave a sudden cry of astonishment. Their way was blocked before them—not by an army, as those in the rear imagined when the whole line before them halted suddenly—but by an enormous wall. It stretched away on either side farther than the eye could reach. It was nine feet high and twenty feet thick, so that its summit was a very fortress for defenders. There was only one opening, as Cortes made sure, sending men to either side who testified that they could find no other, and that the wall seemed to have no end. This entrance was most curiously contrived so that those who attempted to pass through the semi-circular passage would be at the mercy of whoever held the gate.

"Now I understand," exclaimed Cortes, "what the Cempoal-

lans told me of the barrier the Tlascalans built to keep out their enemies. 'Tis no race of fools who fashioned such a rampart. But now let us be on the lookout whether there may not be some way of passing it. We have not travelled so far to be halted here."

With the greatest caution, muskets and crossbows ready, Cortes approached the entrance. There was no foe to be seen, no warder to call out to them; but this only roused his prudence the more. A hidden enemy—if the Tlascalans were indeed enemies—was more dangerous than two whose presence he would observe.

But there was no stir as Cortes advanced into the gateway. No Tlascalan came forward to welcome or to forbid their passage. And to their great astonishment, the Spaniards found themselves unopposed upon the soil of the Republic of Tlascala.

"I would I knew what this means," Cortes said to himself, who could not know of the deliberations of the Tlascalan council to make no show of force which they could not later disavow, "but we must go farther before the riddle can be solved."

Then he gave orders that the infantry should follow at a good pace while with his little troop of horsemen he rode ahead to reconnoitre. About two leagues from the wall he caught sight of a small body of Indian warriors.

"Call to them, Gonsalvo," he commanded, "that we may learn what the temper of this folk is towards us."

Sandoval called out and waved to them, but the Tlascalans, after a glance at the astonishing spectacle of mounted men, turned and ran.

"After them, Señors," cried Cortes, and the sixteen horsemen dashed in pursuit.

To their amazement the swift Tlascalans found that they were being overtaken. They had trusted to their speed, knowing that no human legs could outrun them. But the beasts which bore the white men flew over the ground with a terrifying swiftness, and like wild animals at bay, the Indians turned face to the foe they could not escape.

But they did not wait for the Spaniards' advance. They themselves sprang forward and with their notched swords gave many a terrific blow on horse and man.

"Now you have a taste of the fighting you craved," called out Cortes to Sandoval even as he leaned down from his saddle to run his own blade into the back of an Indian below him.

The fight, however sharp, could not last long, for the Spaniards, few as they were, outnumbered the Tlascalans. Already two Indians lay dead and three more were wounded. Then, suddenly, the Spaniards heard wild cries in front of them and beheld a large body of Indians rushing to the aid of their countrymen.

"Saint James!" called out Cortes, " 'tis not a taste of fighting, Gonsalvo, but a banquet that awaits us. There must be a thousand or more of them."

His own adventurous blood was stirred by the danger; his blows were falling to right and left and he was laughing with excitement. But the prudence of the commander gained over the valor of the cavalier. There must be help, he knew, and that quickly.

"Ride, Fernando," he commanded; "ride back and bid our

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brothers hasten to our aid. Till then we can keep these heathen busy."

But in truth that was a boast that might soon be a vain one. The Tlascalans fought as Cortes had never seen Indians fight. These were no gentle Cubans, half conquered already by awe of the Spaniards; not even the Tabascans who had fought fiercely when Cortes landed on the Isthmus a few months earlier. These warriors were as brave as Spaniards themselves, well drilled, too, Cortes, observed, though their tactics were so different from his own.

His trained soldier's eye took in the details of their arms and armour. Even while he warded off a blow of an obsidian sword, Cortes wondered how it had been possible to fashion so hard a substance into so effective a weapon. And the copper spears were as deadly instruments of war as any that hung in European armouries.

Yet while he noticed this and the presence of the man he knew must be their leader, whose yellow pennant floated first in one part of the field and then in the other, Cortes was calling out orders, bidding his little troop close up and if possible form a square against the foe. But it was too late now for this. The Tlascalans, who had been so terrified at the sight of the horses, now seemed determined to revenge themselves on the beasts for their terror. The Spaniards protected their chargers even at the expense of wounds to their own bodies. But Cortes saw with dismay that two of the poor animals had sunk to the earth, their necks severed each by a single blow. One of the horsemen too was severely wounded, but much as Cortes regretted this, his chief concern was for the loss of the

horses. If only his infantry would arrive, he thought. Then there flashed through his mind the words of the old ballads of Roland fighting the Moors at Roncesvalles, and how he blew his horn in vain to summon Charlemagne to his aid.

And always in the thick of the fighting the yellow pennant waved, and Cortes caught glimpses of the strong body and the keen eyes of the young leader. He was shouting words the Spaniard could not comprehend, but he knew by the tone that they signified "victory."

Just then, above all the din of swords, shrieks of the wounded and terrified neighing of the horses, Cortes caught another sound. It was the tramp of men and the rumbling of cannon.

"Hold on bravely, men," he called out. "Our brothers will be here ere we take a long breath."

The Tlascalan leader heard and saw the approaching Spanish reinforcements, but he did not fear them. He and his troops were fighting to preserve their sacred country against invaders, and the gods were giving them the victory.

Cortes cried out swift orders; a horseman, hacking away the Indians who endeavored to stay him, flew back with them. The advancing force spread out on either side of the cavalry and the engaging foe, and then hastening forward, fired a volley of musket shots and cannon balls.

The result was instantaneous. Almost before those wounded by this volley had dropped to the ground, the Tlascalans ceased their attack. They stood motionless for a moment, then as if with one impulse, turned and fled.

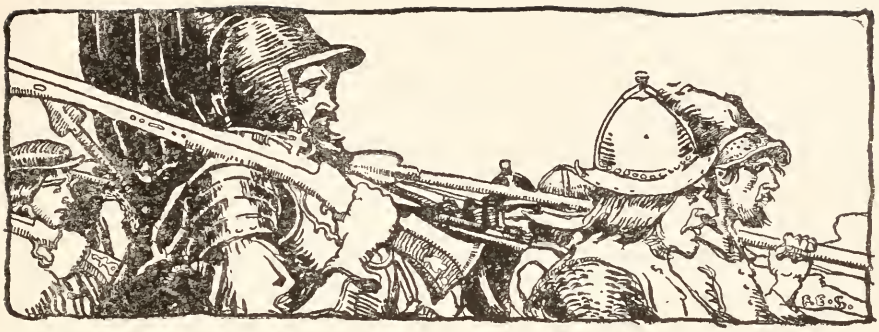
The Spaniards waited and after a few moments saw that

their enemy had had enough and that they need not fear another attack.

"If the man who invented gunpowder had only let us know his name," declared Alvarado, taking off his helmet and wiping a bloodstained cheek, "I'd have masses said to hasten his soul to the highest part of Heaven. But for our artillery none of us would have lived to see Spain again."

Cortes had assured himself of the damage his little troop had sustained. He sent Fernando to bring Marina from the rear, and when she arrived he bade her ask one of the wounded Tlascalans whom they had taken prisoners the name of their young leader.

"He says, my Lord," the girl answered, "that it is Prince Xicotencatl, son of one of the four Caciques, rulers of Tlascala."



CHAPTER VIII

St. James! And Close Up for Spain!

THOUGH his men were weary, Cortes allowed them little time for rest. Night would soon fall, and before that he must find a safer spot for an encampment. He gave orders to move forward and, with Fernando at his side, he let his little army march in front of him that he might judge of its exact condition.

In addition to the Spaniards, there were about three thousand Indian allies, drawn from Cempoalla or from other towns and villages through which they had passed. Between these troops and the Spanish rear guard came a few Indian women whose duty it was to cook and to help prepare the camps.

Cortes signalled to Marina. The girl gazed at the Spanish leader in awe. For the first time she had seen him as he was indeed, the great commander. Her eyes had followed him that day as he dashed from one part of the field to the other, and her heart had beat with anxiety lest he be wounded.

"Tell me, Marina," he asked, "why is it that the Indian warriors so often fail to give the final blow to an almost conquered enemy? Oft times this day did I believe that the last moment

for some one of my soldiers had come, and then the blow failed to fall, and he was saved."

"It is because an Indian warrior values more than a dead foe one whom he can deliver alive as a sacrifice to the gods," answered the girl, wiping with her scarf the blood that came from a slight flesh cut on Cortes's hand which he had not noticed.

"So that is why so many of us escaped, Señor," cried Fernando. "Methought at one time even Alvarado had been slain. 'Tis a pity though we lost the two beasts."

"I would indeed it had not happened," exclaimed Cortes. "Now the Indians have learned that our steeds can die, they will have lost some awe of them."

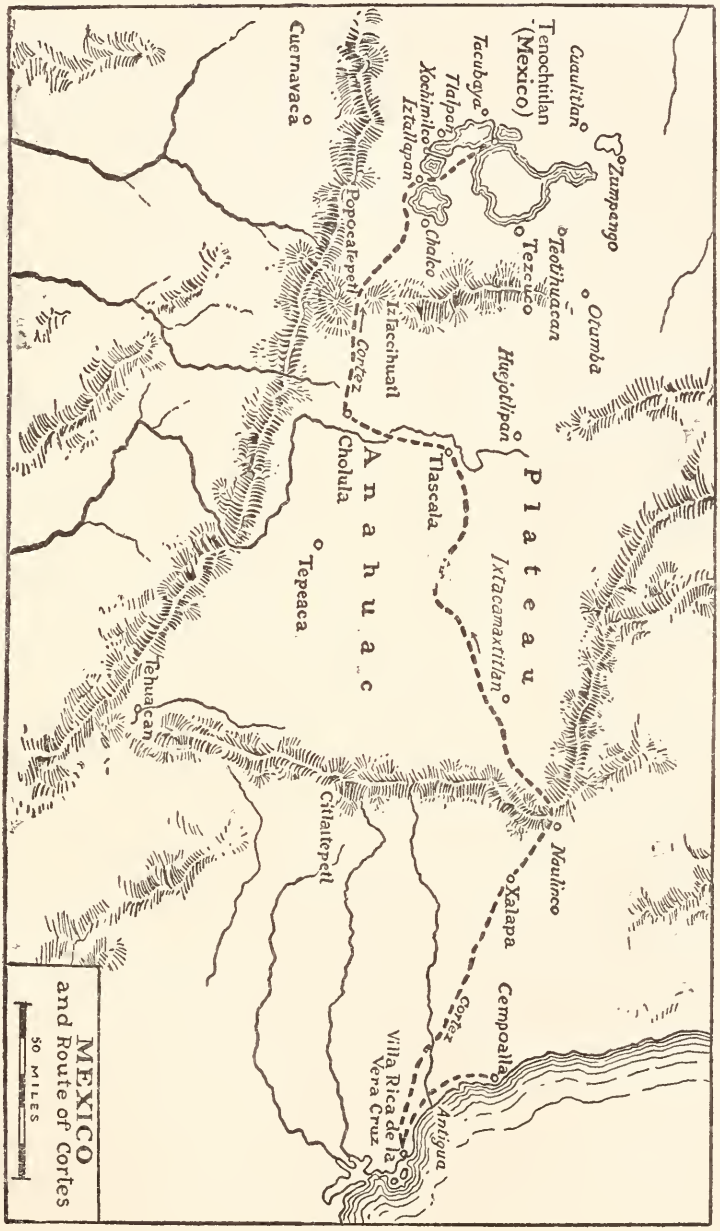
"They did not see them die," suggested Marina, "though they saw them fall. Perchance they will think they rose on their feet again."

"Not when they behold their corpses yonder," and Cortes pointed mournfully.

"Let us bury them, Señor," cried Fernando.

" 'Tis an idea almost too big for that small head of yours," said Cortes, giving a kindly glance at the lad. Then he turned to command that a trench be hastily dug and the horses buried in it. When this was finished he rode on ahead until he saw a level spot near a stream that was suitable for a camp.

Here were no hospitable or curious natives bearing food as a gift or to barter, though deserted huts told of a population which could not be far away. For the first time since the Spaniards had landed at Vera Cruz they had to depend upon foraging for provisions. And since Cortes forbade their wandering more than a few feet from the encampment, they had



MAP SHOWING THE MARCH OF CORTES FROM HIS LANDING-PLACE TO TENOCHTITLAN

to content themselves with a light supper. And sleep too was curtailed, for this was no time, their commander realized, to trust to a handful of sentinels; so he placed guards of a hundred men at various points, and their comrades, wiping the sleep out of their eyes, and only a little less weary for their short rest, relieved them at midnight. He did not know that night attacks were contrary to the customs of the natives.

It was just at dawn when Cortes awoke. He had slept but little as he lay in full armour, with only the saddle-cloth of his horse between him and the ground and his own cloak as a protection from the sharp mountain air. He bade Fernando rouse the troop by touching each captain on the arm. He had no desire to announce by trumpet-call their movements to any who might be within earshot.

The world was grey and dreary at that early hour, and the Spaniards felt their hearts heavy within them, while a fear of the dangers that might be lurking behind the dense white mist encircling them made them shiver at every sound. It was not until they listened, kneeling, to the familiar Latin words of the mass and looked upon the calm face of Father Olmedo that the sense of the every-day world and their courage welled back into them.

The horsemen rode first, their steeds half hidden in the mist to the infantry which followed. Cortes's orders for the day were that the entire force should keep in as close a formation as if marching in parade. They had gone but a short distance when the sun rose and the grey world now glowed all yellow and red, and the armour of the troops glistened like the dew upon the maguey leaves.

HE WAS NOT SPARED

There before them they beheld the foe—a thousand or more, yelling in defiance and shaking their spears and arrows. Cortes sent forward interpreters, bidding them inform the Tlascalans that his advance was not hostile; that all he desired was a passage through their land to the kingdom of Montezuma. But the Tlascalans cut short the interpreters' speech with cries of derision and sent a shower of arrows against the Spanish ranks.

"Since they will not have peace," cried Cortes, "Then let them take war. On, Alvarado, St. James! and close up for Spain!"

The horsemen urged forward and the infantry followed at their heels. The plain narrowed to a defile through which a stream meandered and the ground was soggy, so that the horses sank to their fetlocks in mud. The guns too could scarcely move and now, while the Spaniards were pushing, pulling, crying out orders and counter-orders, the Indians kept up a continuous rain of missiles upon them.

At last, with patience, force and the help of their Indian allies, the Spanish troops moved forward at a better pace and turned a corner of the defile around which the Tlascalans had disappeared. The defile opened out into a wide plain and there Cortes beheld a vast army spread out—thirty or more thousands of Tlascalans.

There was no need of parleying, of asking what their intentions were. The terrible war drum, the beats of which could be heard for miles away, was all the herald needed. And as if they were children answering their father's call, the Tlascalans rushed straight on their foe.

Cortes drew his horsemen close together, and rode to meet them, the horses trampling down Indian after Indian. But the fallen left no gaps, their comrades swarmed in over their bodies. Again Cortes beheld the yellow and white striped pennants and the yellow and white painted naked bodies that marked the contingent of Xicotencatl. And above them floated the banner of his house, a Heron on a Rock. Still hemmed in by the defile, the Spaniards could not bring either their infantry or their guns into effective play. Once again they must rely upon their small force of cavalry.

This, the Tlascalans realized, was their chief foe, and Xicotencatl directed his fiercest attack upon it. With arrows and spiked clubs the Indians fell upon the vanguard. One of the horsemen, Moran, whose horse had carried him a few feet beyond his comrades, was surrounded and pulled down from his horse. At his agonized cry for help the Spaniards renewed their struggles. They fought hand to hand; they stabbed and slashed; they drove their pikes into the ranks ahead of them, and at last succeeded in gaining possession of Moran's body, so covered with wounds that he died that night. All of his rescuers were themselves badly wounded, and Moran's horse was killed.

The Cempoallan allies of the Spaniards fought desperately, but though there was no doubt about their bravery, they lost heart, and one of the Caciques called out to Marina, who would not remain in the rear with the other women:

"I see nothing but death for us; we can never get through this pass alive."

But Marina had already caught the dauntless spirit of the

Spaniards as well as their language. She called back to him:

"The God of the Christians is with us, and He will carry us safely through."

And now it became apparent that the struggle to regain Moran had not been in vain. The Tlascalans had been driven back from the mouth of the defile and, as on the day before, the artillery was able to finish what the cavalry had begun. Slowly, in perfect order, the Tlascalans began to fall back, unable to stand against this dreaded new weapon.

"That chieftain is a warrior indeed," said Alvarado to Sandoval after they felt they could afford to waste breath for words. "That is no terrorstricken savage, but a commander who wisely determines upon retreat because the odds are against him."

It was evening again when Cortes made camp. This night there was no lack of food, as provisions in plenty were found in cottages from which the inhabitants had hastily fled. When the guards had been placed and the wounded had been cared for, Cortes had time to think of resting his own weary body. He sat down by himself on the steps of the tower that crowned the hill, and laying aside his helmet, rested his chin in his hands.

He knew now that his real work had only just begun, and that his task was to be harder than it had seemed when the Cempoallans and the other tribes welcomed them as a foe to the hated Aztecs. Now these Tlascalans, whose bravery and soldierly qualities would have made them the most valuable allies, had chosen to oppose the Spaniards, and time and lives

must be spent in order to subdue them. If he did not conquer them soon or win them over, the prestige of the white men would be lost, and it was likely that the other Indians would then desert them. For a few moments Cortes experienced a weight of discouragement that he could not throw off. If he must hack his way through foes to Tenochtitlan, what would there be left of his army by the time he reached Montezuma's city? And lest he show a sign of this discouragement to others, Cortes pretended to be asleep upon the steps, though long after Alvarado, who had sought to have a word with him, was sleeping on the ground, Cortes's thoughts were busied with his problem.

The next day he was again the fearless, purposeful leader. As his sentinels reported that there was no hostile force nearby, he determined to rest his men for a day or more. He sent an embassy to the capital of the Tlascalans, repeating his message of goodwill and his desire to make friends. While they were gone he exercised the more venturesome of his troops in exploring the country about. There were several skirmishes with small bodies of Indians, and Cortes brought back a number of prisoners.

The envoys returned and told him that they had met Xicotencatl on the way, and that when the warrior had listened to their message he bade them turn and take back his answer:

"You Spaniards may pass on as soon as you choose to Tlascala. And when you reach it your flesh will be hewn from your bones for sacrifice to the gods. If you prefer to remain where you are then I will visit you there on the morrow."

"I would we were back in Cuba," sighed Fernando to Ber-

nal Diaz, who was standing as sentinel before the hut in which Cortes was resting. "I think there's no one who would call me a coward," continued the boy, "who has seen the odds against which I fought the other day. The Captain himself said that once I warded off a blow from his head and praised me for it. But these paynims and their devil gods and their living sacrifices make my heart sick."

"You are weary with too much fighting and with lack of sleep," added the older man sympathetically. "In truth, I mind not admitting that mine own spirit grows a bit faint when I think of the hosts against us. I would I had a good flagon of canary to hearten it. But hark, lad, we'll fight none the worse on the morrow for our fear this even. I'll wager there's not a soldier alive who hath not felt fear some time in his life. Yet we will feel ready for heaven, if we are destined for it soon, after we have confessed to Father Olmedo and got his absolution. Be off first, Fernando, and I will follow as soon as I am relieved from duty."

So for half the night good Father Olmedo was kept listening to confessions and shriving the soldiers.

Meanwhile Cortes, knowing that a battle was inevitable, thought how he might make the best of conditions. He determined that he could deploy the troops more advantageously on the more level ground, and therefore that it were wiser to advance towards the Tlascal rather than to await their coming. He had not far to go. A plain six miles in length opened out before him, and there stood arrayed such a sight as no European eyes had ever beheld—an army of Indians so vast that it could not be counted.

The Spaniards gazed in wonder. Even those among them who had fought the Moors before Granada had never seen such brilliant banners and panoplies.

"Behold," said Alvarado, his quick eye missing no detail, "how their banners are borne in the rear instead of in the midst of their ranks. Yon is the Heron again, the sign of their leader, and the Eagle with outspread wings must be the banner of the Republic itself."

"It costs little to clothe a man in the ranks," commented Sandoval as they rode forward; "naught but a loin cloth and a few painted stripes about his body."

"But the chieftains' armour is costly enough," replied Alvarado as he returned from bearing Cortes's message to the artillery to hasten forward. "That quilted cotton armour must be hard to get here where they raise no cotton, and those feathered mantles mean many a day's work for those that snare the birds and those that fit the plumage together."

" 'Tis their arms that interest me the most," said Sandoval; "those staves with murderous blades set along their sides might be the end of us if gunpowder had ne'er been discovered, and . . ."

His sentence was interrupted by an arrow which struck his helmet and glanced off its steel ridge. This was the first raindrop of the storm that followed: arrows, javelins, even stones; and like thunder were the cries of defiance that rolled from rank to rank of the brave Tlascalans. Many of the missiles made their way into unprotected bits of Spanish flesh; but Cortes continued to advance until he had reached the distance he had set himself. Then he formed his troops, pushing for-

ward the artillery, and the cannon balls were hurled into the compact mass of the Indians.

Howls of terror, of agony and rage went up from every part of the field. There was a short period of immobility and then—like the ninth wave of an army of breakers—the Tlascalans fell upon the foe. There were so many and the Spaniards so few that perhaps for a moment no man in either army believed that the white men could resist this onslaught. But Spanish swords and Spanish guns accounted for far more than an equal number of their foes. The Tlascalans were checked for a moment only, then once more they dashed forward. Again and again was this rush and its check repeated, but this could not continue. Cortes saw his men falling about him and knew that there were none to replace the fallen, while there were hundreds of Indians behind every comrade that fell.

"Only St. James himself can save us," said Father Olmedo as he went from one fallen soldier to another, binding up the wounds quickly and offering ghostly consolation. But while matters were indeed desperate for the Spaniards dissension arose in the ranks of their foes. Xicotencatl, burning with patriotism and the passion of a warrior, had spared neither himself nor his troops. But one Cacique, older than he, and jealous of the authority given to his junior, disputed an order of Xicotencatl's and refused to advance.

"I had not believed that Tlascalan earth could breed a coward," taunted Xicotencatl. The enraged Cacique, oblivious to all else but his personal wrongs, challenged his commander to single combat.

"It is no time for that," replied the young leader hotly, "now when the feet of foes are upon our sacred soil."

He turned and rushed forward against the Spaniards again, not doubting that his countrymen would sink his personal injury for the moment to follow him against their common foe. But the disgruntled Cacique had been too deeply wounded in his pride, and while Xicotencatl advanced he withdrew from the field with all his force, amounting to ten thousand men.

Thus was Cortes saved; for though Xicotencatl and his diminished army fought with redoubled fury, the Spaniards, cheered by the knowledge that their forces were now more even, found new courage and strength to continue. Xicotencatl with sad heart beheld his men no longer able to resist the gunfire of their foes, and gradually retreated, fighting each step of the way.

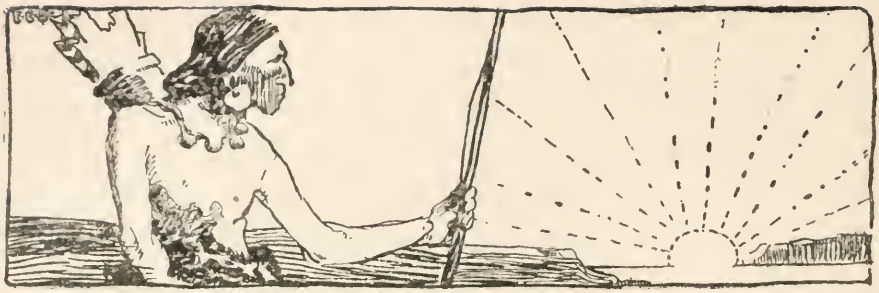
Cortes could scarcely realize that the day was his, that the huge host which had opposed him that morning was now melting away. He was content to let them go without attempting to follow. His wounded and his dead claimed his attention. There was no oil for binding up the wounds, so, as one of the conquerors related long afterwards, they used the grease from the bodies of dead Indians for that purpose.

In the meantime Xicotencatl was burning to retrieve his defeat. On the following day when Cortes sent an envoy to the capital again to demand a passage through the country, the young Cacique argued heatedly that they try another blow against the invaders. He called the priests to his aid, and the priests answered saying:

"These *Teules* are not gods indeed, but they are the children

of the Sun. While the Sun shines great is their strength and the strength of their strange weapons. But when the Sun has gone to rest their strength declines. Therefore, oh Xicotencatl, though it be against the custom of our warriors, you and your host must fall upon them in the darkness and overcome them."

The Spaniards slept as the silent Indian army, ten thousand in number, crept upon them. Only the eyes of one sentinel beheld by the faint moonlight the advancing dark mass. As silently as his foes advanced, he gave the alarm. Then the Tlascalans were astounded by the loud battle cry of the white men and a terrible fire of musketry. They fled, firing arrows backward as they ran, and Cortes's men rode through the semi-darkness, killing till they were weary.



CHAPTER IX

The Spy

AHUITZOTL, Montezuma's chief page, no longer yearned for the mountains and the trail of the ocelot. One day, not long after he had returned to his regular duties, Montezuma spoke to him.

"The blood of the warrior stirs in you, Ahuitzotl," he said, and the page bent low. "I read in your eyes the longing to strengthen your arm and to perfect yourself in all that a warrior must know. Such a desire is one that a ruler of Anahuac must welcome. In truth the land has need of warriors, and perchance. . . ."

The Emperor did not finish the sentence, but sat lost in thought for many minutes while Ahuitzotl fanned him slowly with a fan of tortoise-shell and turkey feathers.

"So," continued the monarch, rousing himself: "it is well that you should be prepared and instructed in all the duties of a Cacique. Speak without fear and tell me who is there among all the nobles of my court whom men call the best and bravest warrior."

"After you, Lord Montezuma," answered the boy, "it is Prince Guatemozin whom all men honour."

"That is well," said Montezuma thoughtfully. "Take then this signet-ring to him," and the monarch handed to Ahuitzotl a ring engraved with the sign which stood for his royal name, "and say to him that Montezuma bids him instruct you in all the knowledge of a warrior."

Guatemozin received the boy gladly. He found teaching him no hardship. He had noted the strong and supple body of the page when he played tennis; and the story of his truancy and the skin of the ocelot he had killed proved that he had unusual daring and courage. It was a pleasure to train one who already showed such promise. Ahuitzotl's gratitude to Emperor and Prince was unbounded.

Not only was he instructed in the use of bow and arrows, javelins, spears and shields, but Guatemozin explained to him all the banners and devices borne by the great Caciques of the Empire, until they were as familiar to him as the plumage of the different birds of the forest. He taught him also the laws which governed warriors in the field. Death was the punishment for disobedience, and death too was the penalty for the soldier, no matter how high his rank, who should endeavor to win personal fame by attacking the enemy before the general signal was given. Princess Tecuichpo, who was sometimes present at these lessons, related the instance of a king of Tezcuco who put two of his own sons to death for disobedience in the field.

And Guatemozin, assured that a man fights the better for his country if he is familiar with the glorious deeds of her

sons, taught Ahuitzotl the history of the coming of the Aztecs from the northwest to the land of Anahuac.

"Two hundred years ago," he said, "on the spot where this great city of Tenochtitlan stands, our ancestors halted by the borders of the lake. All was wild and lonely and no sign of man's habitation. They had wandered long through plains and over mountains, seeking a spot to settle in and to build their city. The gods surely, they said, would send them some message, some sign by which they could decide when they had reached the appointed place. Suddenly one of them pointed to a great rock which rose from the water. There grew a gigantic cactus plant and on it, with outstretched wings, perched a royal eagle, holding a serpent in his claws. Here, the seers declared, was the omen from the gods. So upon the borders of the lake they built this our city, and called it Tenochtitlan, from *tunal,* a cactus on a stone."

Guatemozin was stern in his discipline with Ahuitzotl. A warrior, he said, must be able to stand fatigue of all kinds; and during the hours of drill he was merciless in his exactions. No matter how wearied the boy's arms might be, he was not spared in the bending of the toughest bow or the throwing of javelin. It was the duty of Ahuitzotl, who was still the Emperor's page, to sleep at the foot of Montezuma's couch. But many a night, by order of Guatemozin, he stood motionless on his feet, that he might accustom himself to a sentinel's watch. Fasting too was part of his training, and often when he was holding golden plates and cups before Montezuma, the boy had not tasted so much as a sip of water for two days and nights.

However, Ahuitzotl had no complaint to make of Guatemozin's methods. He knew that he was being hardened by sternness as the soldiers often hardened wooden spearheads in the fire. He felt the affection behind the sternness, and he rejoiced at a single word of praise from his master.

When Cacama, his father, returned as one of the envoys from the visit to the Spaniards, Ahuitzotl listened with greedy ears to the accounts he gave his royal master of the appearance of the Teules. Later, when Cacama had looked on proudly at a lesson given his son by Guatemozin, he went in from the noon sunshine into the cool dark hall of the palace, and answered the boy's questions.

"Yes, the Teules must be men," he remarked, "even as we are, since the features of their chief are my features. So great is the resemblance, son, that there was none present at the meeting that did not observe it and marvel."

"Tell me of their arms, father," begged the young warrior; "of what shape and what material are they?"

"I can not tell you much. They wore at their sides weapons, but they were encased in coverings of metal. I heard strange tales of some terrible magic they possess by which they kill their enemies, but I saw it not. The strange beasts on which they sit, those I beheld. You have seen the picture-writings of them, but you can not imagine how wondrous they are."

"Whence come the strangers, father?" inquired the boy, "and what will they of us?"

"In this matter you are as wise as the wisest Cacique, Ahuitzotl. There is none in Anahuac who longs not to answer this

question. And all of us long to know"—here he leaned forward and whispered—"what Montezuma will do if they persist in their determination to come hither."

"It may mean war then?" whispered Ahuitzotl back.

"Only the gods know," answered Cacama.

Their talk was brought to an end by a slave who summoned the page to Montezuma's presence.

"You wear fine garments and dwell in splendor, my son," commented his father as he took leave of him; "but there is no fear now, thanks to Prince Guatemozin, that you will be harmed by soft living."

Ahuitzotl found Montezuma in a small chamber where he was accustomed to hold his most private audiences. Standing before the monarch were Guatemozin and the High Priest. The boy waited motionless at the entrance of the room while the three talked in tones so low that he could not catch a word. At last, after half an hour perhaps, Montezuma beckoned to him to come forward.

The High Priest spoke: "You have heard, boy, since you quitted the teocalli the news of the strangers who have come to the land?"

Ahuitzotl answered: "I have heard."

"You know, perchance," continued the priest, "that they have sent messages to our Lord Montezuma, saying they purposed visiting him, and that he has sent envoys in return to the strangers that the way to Tenochtitlan is too long?"

"My father has told me of all this," replied the boy.

"Prince Guatemozin says that he has trained you in all that a warrior should know," the priest went on. "Therefore you

have learned that caution and cunning are as valuable as courage. What do you say?"

"So has he taught me," answered Ahuitzotl.

"You are young to be present at a secret council, boy," said the priest frowning, "and it may be that we do wrong to admit you; but the times are strange ones. Nevertheless harken. It is needful that we have further information about these Teules before our Lord will decide how he will deal with them. They must be spied upon in secret, by eyes that can see much."

Ahuitzotl's heart began to beat loudly. He did not dare ask himself what the priest could mean.

The priest continued: "We have learned that the strangers have crossed the borders of the Republic of Tlascala, and that there have been battles between them and our ancient foes. He who would spy them out must risk much. He would have to go into an enemy's land and hide both from the Teules and from the Tlascalans. He must be brave, quick and cautious."

There was a pause and Ahuitzotl, though his gaze was upon the ground, as was proper when in the presence of his sovereign felt three pairs of eyes fixed upon his face. Then the priest spoke again:

"Ahuitzotl, do you know one fitted for this task?"

The boy could not answer. His longing was so great that it rendered him speechless. Could it be he, he wondered, whom they had chosen?

Then Montezuma spoke:

"Ahuitzotl, it must not be a man who goes forth on this errand. He must be small that he may hide the better. But

he must have, if not the size, the courage of a man. Guatemozin has chosen for me. Go!"

Ahuitzotl now found words in which to tell of his gratitude for their faith in him. After he had been given directions as to the road he was to follow, he set forth for the hut near the Tlascalan border where he would find the garments of a hunter, that would be his best disguise in either country.

As he went along the highway he was recognized as the page of Montezuma by many whose business took them to Tenochtitlan, and men questioned him about his journeying, wondering if his presence away from the capital betokened anything of importance.

"I go a-hunting," Ahuitzotl would answer, and this satisfied their curiosity.

As he climbed the heights Ahuitzotl noted gladly how his strength had grown under his military training, that there was a great difference in his endurance even since the day he killed the ocelot. Along the way were rest-houses, placed at intervals for the couriers, and here he forced himself, impatient as he was, to stay and eat the food provided for travellers, as he did not wish to excite attention by hurrying on as he would have liked to do.

At the borders of the Tlascalan Republic he found an old soldier in charge of a troop of men who guarded the frontier. The old warrior led the boy inside, looking carefully around to make sure that there was no one near enough to overhear him.

"Here," he said, handing over a bundle containing the roughest kind of sandals and a single short robe of *nequen*

and a strong but unpolished bow and arrows and a huntsman's knife, "are what were left with me for you. This garb is neither so soft nor so fair to see as what you now are wearing, young traveller, but if I may hazard a guess, 'tis an honour for you to wear it. He who gave it to me showed a signet of the Highest and bade me keep you here over night and during that time to train your tongue to speak words in the Tlascalan fashion. I have lived many years here on the border and if need were, I could pass among our foes as one of them."

He asked no questions of Ahuitzotl, but all the while he was going about the hut, hiding the telltale garments of the page and laying food before him, he made the boy pronounce words after him until he was satisfied with the sound of them. During the night he continued the lesson until two hours before dawn, when he led him to a mat and bade him lie down and rest until day.

At dawn he woke Ahuitzotl, gave him food to eat and to put in his wallet. Then he pointed to an almost overgrown path through the forest.

"Yonder lies your way, farewell," he said.

Ahuitzotl tramped all day in the direction the soldier had advised as the most likely to lead him to the Spaniards. He avoided the villages and hid in the thicket whenever a farmer or herdsman approached. When there was no place to hide he sauntered along, speaking if spoken to to arouse no suspicion. He slept for a few hours in the middle of the day, so that he would be able to keep on well into the night. It was night when he heard the sound of many voices which he judged must belong to a party of warriors.

He crept close in the dark and listened. He was rejoiced to hear that they were talking of the Teules, of how they had entered Tlascala and how Xicotencatl had faced them bravely, even though the terrible weapons had forced his army to retire. Ahuitzotl heard them boasting that they would yet destroy the strangers before they advanced much farther into the land; and from their talk he was able to learn about how far off, and in what direction, the Spaniards were to be met.

He wasted no further time in listening now to what would at another time have been the most absorbing subject, of how the Tlascalans had fought and how many they had slain. He had no difficulty in finding his way in the dark through the forest. From the time he could walk Cacama had taught him woodcraft, and he had not forgotten it during his years in Tenochtitlan. He did not stop for sleep nor to shoot bird or beast for food. As he went he ate from the contents of his wallet. It was not until the following night, when he knew that he must be near the approaching strangers, that he lay down to sleep. There was little use in going on farther, he thought, for if his calculations were correct, their next advance would bring them to where he now rested.

He was so overcome with sleep that no cry of any animal in the forest made any impression upon his brain. Even another sound which, had he been awake, would have roused all his caution, did not stir him. Men were moving along the path, men who obeyed orders whispered in silence.

Suddenly the feet of one of the Tlascalans hit against some soft obstacle, and Ahuitzotl, awakened by the unexpected

blow, sprang to his knees. The Tlascalan leaned down and felt in the darkness the boy's head and coarse robe.

" 'Tis only a slave or a hunter," he whispered to those about him. "It is lucky for him that he made no outcry to betray our presence, or I should kill him. Sleep again, slave, if you will," he said scornfully, "sleep, while warriors go forth in the service of your country."

Ahuitzotl moved quietly to one side and let the host of men pass. He was thoroughly roused now, and he realized what a narrow escape he had had. He felt sure that some event of great importance was about to take place. He waited until all the troops had passed, then followed a short distance in the rear. From the few words which had come to his ear he knew that this was a night attack upon the Teules. He had caught too the name of Xicotencatl, and he remembered that he was the young Cacique who had made his escape from the teocalli and from the city so mysteriously on the day of Princess Tecuichpo's wedding festival.

Keeping as far in the rear as necessary, he climbed the hill after the Tlascalans, but ran to one side instead of going straight ahead with them. He surmounted a small summit from which he could just distinguish a shapeless dark mass advancing towards what he knew must be the camp of the white men below. Then he beheld a sudden flaring of numerous small lights, and then . . . he fell to the ground at the terrible sound which burst from the camp. He saw and heard the terrified Tlascalans beat a retreat. What else was there for them to do, he thought? How could men face such forces as these Teules controlled? On his hillock he was safe from the

pursuit which was driving the Indians back with terrible slaughter. And there, trembling as he had never thought a warrior could tremble, Ahuitzotl spent the rest of the night, dozing at times and waking again and again in terror of the guns.

In the daylight he was himself again. Looking down into the level space below, he could see among the dead that lay there some clothed in strange clothes. It gave him courage to know that Teules could be slain by arrows, and he clasped his bow gratefully. When he had carefully reconnoitred, he descended nearer the camp until he was close enough to distinguish one figure from another. Almost all the morning he spent in a tree, his keen eyes missing no detail of armour or equipment. He had no trouble in picking out their leader—he might in truth have been his father had his color and clothes been the same. He watched how he went among the troops and could imagine that he was lavish with words of praise and cheer.

Later in the day he beheld three Tlascalans and a woman in Aztec dress talking to them. His father had told him of Marina, whose tongue was able to turn the speech of the white men into that of the Indians. Ahuitzotl slipped down from the tree and wormed himself along the ground until he was able to approach through the thicket within a few feet of Marina. He heard her say to the messengers the words put into her mouth by the Spanish leader who stood beside her and was thus transmitting his message to the Council at Tlascala.

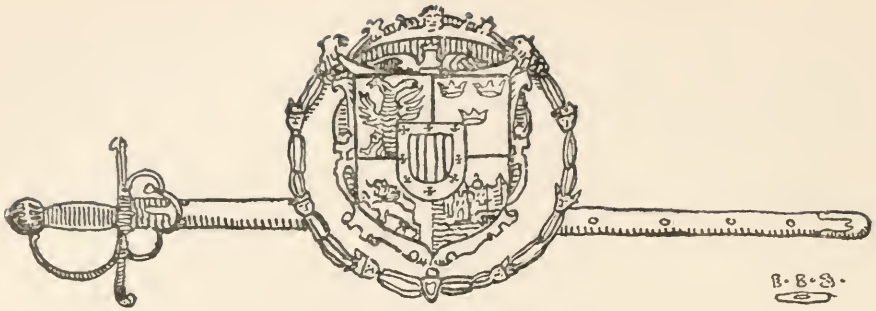
"Tell them," she said, "that if they will now welcome us in their city that we may pass through to Anahuac, we will for-

get how they have received us and will be their friends. But if they still oppose us, I will enter their city as a conqueror and will not leave one house nor one man."

And Ahuitzotl saw that the Spaniard handed to the envoys the arrow he held in one hand and the letter which he held in the other. He needed no explanation to tell him that these were the symbols of war and of peace, between which Tlascala must choose.

He watched the messengers depart, and found it hard to decide whether he ought to follow them and learn what choice the Republic would make, or to stay and observe all he could of the Teules.

He stayed where he was and so could not know that the councillors in Tlascala regretfully decided that there was no use in bringing greater fury upon themselves. They had fought, they said, as bravely as men could fight; but these strangers might not be beaten by day or by night. Nor could Ahuitzotl know that the envoys returning towards the Spaniards with excuses for the past and promises of friendship, stopped at the camp of Xicotencatl, according to their orders, to bid him, in the name of the Republic, cease his attacks on the Teules, nor that this young chief refused to disband his army or to send food to the men he had fought so bitterly. He kept the envoys with him by force. So the Spaniards failed to learn what the rulers of Tlascala had chosen.



CHAPTER X

The Sword of Cortes

AHUITZOTL too awaited the return of the envoys. He did not wish to go back to Tenochtitlan until he was ready to report to Montezuma whether the Spaniards and the Tlascalans were to be friends or foes. There was no minute in the days which followed that was not filled with interest for the Aztec boy. From the branches of the thick oaktree, his observation point, he could command the camp, could watch the daily routine of the soldiers, could see them changing guard, drilling and resting. Even more than the men, the horses excited his curiosity. He saw where they were tethered, and it would have been easy for him to creep near enough to them at night to touch them; but he did not feel sure that they might not possess some power unknown to beasts of his own land by which they could call out to their masters and betray his presence.

At night and at early dawn Ahuizotl would hunt for his dinner in the forest, well away from the camp. Even there he was cautious for fear of falling in with Tlascalans. His

bow would bring down small game that could be cooked and eaten quickly, and fruit was always plentiful. Sometimes too he scouted on the outskirts of a village, and discovering a hut left empty for a moment, would enter and help himself to cakes of maize baked by the women. In the enemy's land this was his right, he said to himself.

He liked to think that he was already a warrior, penned between two enemies, spying upon both of them. The leader of the Teules, he found, was not content to stay quietly in one place. Ahuitzotl watched him set forth with a small troop of men to scour the country round about. He tried to follow them; but though he had been the fastest runner of all his companions in the palace, he discovered that he could not even keep them in sight when they were mounted. So he returned to his tree.

He heard the Cempoallan allies, talking among themselves, use the word "Malinche" when speaking of Cortes. This, he knew, was the Aztec name of Marina, his interpreter; and the Indians, ignorant of the Spaniard's name or unable to pronounce it, were accustomed to speak of him as Malinche.

Ahuitzotl's eyes had soon discovered Fernando, Cortes's page. He saw that they were nearly the same age, though the white lad was slighter and less well developed. He noticed that his services were similar to those he himself rendered to Montezuma. For a moment he forgot that he liked to think of himself as already a warrior, and wished that they too had a common language that they might talk to each other and compare notes boy fashion.

Ahuitzotl witnessed Cortes's return and saw him make a speech to his men, though of course he could not know what it was about, nor that the Spanish leader had found great dissatisfaction among his troops. Many of the former adherents of Velasquez were again looking backward over their shoulder to the easy life on their Cuban estates. This time they did not conspire in secret, but came frankly forward to Cortes and asked him to return to Vera Cruz where, though they had only one ship, they could entrench themselves and wait until this vessel sought aid from Cuba. If, they cried, they had encountered such resistance from a minor country like Tlascala, what had they not to expect when they should meet the armies Montezuma would send against them? The idea of their ever reaching the city of Tenochtitlan was, they told him, "treated as a jest by the whole army." Not one of them, they said, but had received some hurt and many were like St. Sebastian in the altar paintings, dotted with wounds. There was no rest day nor night, they declared; it was more than human bodies could endure.

Cortes listened patiently until they had finished. He saw that this was not the complaint of a small number of his troops, that though the Velasquez faction were the spokesmen, their sentiment was shared by many who had been loyal until then. It was no conspiracy this time, he realized, but a genuine outburst of dissatisfaction caused by fatigue and the contagious fear that had worked through the whole camp. While the men were speaking, although his glance did not seem to move from the faces directly before him, he did not lose the expression of a single man. Even his trusted officers, he saw,

were disturbed. However, he knew that it was no fear of Indians, of wounds or even death, which brought frowns to the brows of Alvarado, Sandoval and de Olid; it was the dread of what would happen if they, the leaders, should be left without an army to lead to victory.

"Men," cried Cortes in a ringing voice, so firm that it brought to Ahuitzotl in his tree a stronger conviction of the strangers' might than the sight of all their arms or their horses—so, he thought, could speak only the greatest leaders of men—"Soldiers and fellow comrades, much of what you say is indeed the truth. Your wounds cry out the story of your valor; such deeds of glory have you wrought as would put to shame the heroes of Greece and Rome. My heart has throbbed with pride when I have beheld you surrounded by the heathen, like boarhounds keeping the tusked swine away. There are no other men in all the world, living or dead, who could do what ye have done. Yet let us not boast too much in our own might, since it is the right hand of God which upholds us. For the Cross we have fought, and as He hath strengthened us so far, so will He continue to strengthen us in coming years. Would you ask of Him to let you go scatheless in battle? Are you not men enough to pay with bodily pains for glory here and the reward which Heaven shall bestow in the world to come on those who bring the truth to the heathen?"

He paused a moment. A few faces, he noticed, had lightened, but the mass was still sullen.

"Truly," he continued, "we have encountered great dangers and unheard of hardships, but did you come to this land in

search of soft living? If I have asked much of you, have I required less of myself? Have I slept upon cushions while you lay upon hard earth; have I moistened my throat with wine while yours went dry, or witnessed from afar your desperate battles? Though we have suffered greatly, men of Spain, have we not been victorious everywhere? By my conscience! (Cortes's favorite oath) have we not conquered the Tlascalans who will sue shortly for peace? Then will they be our allies, and their courage and their hosts which have cost us so dearly will be on our side when we meet the Aztec. And if," he asked in a scornful tone, "if I should listen to these cowardly counsels of yours and should consent to turn our backs upon this glorious enterprise and retreat to the coast, what think you would happen? Not a man or a woman Aztec, Tlascalan, Otomie or Cempoallan, between us and Vera Cruz but would rise and fall upon us. Know then, there is but *one* course for us—we *must* advance.

Still the men were not convinced. They cried out:

"What use to us are victories, since we lose as many in a victory as in a defeat? If we advance it is only to be slaughtered in Montezuma's city."

Cortes now lost patience. Since he could not touch their reason, he must appeal to their emotions.

"And by all the saints," he cried, "if we die there, is it not better to die than to live in dishonour?"

These brave words acted like magic. The chivalry of the Spanish spirit rose to the call, and everywhere, except from the small Velasquez faction, the men cried out, echoing this sentiment and singing the words of the old ballad which Cortes

had quoted to his purpose. The ringleaders, seeing that the majority had been won over, crept away cursing.

The next morning Ahuitzotl, on his return from a hunt for his breakfast, discovered a small party of Tlascalans bound towards the camp. They wore white badges, betokening peace, and they bore a supply of provisions. Crouching low, he crept through the underbrush by the side of the path, and from their talk he learned that in spite of their peaceful appearance, they were in reality spies sent by Xicotencatl. They were to look about and then inform the young Cacique how and when he could best make the attack he was even now planning.

Ahuitzotl praised to himself this cunning on the part of his foe. As he had been taught, it was the duty of a leader to use every method he could to outwit an enemy. He could not decide, however, which side he would wish to see win, his ancient adversaries or the powerful Teules.

The Spaniards had no suspicion of the peace heralds whom they welcomed as a sign that the troubles with the Tlascalans were over and as purveyors of the food they so much needed.

But Marina had been worried ever since the arrival of the heralds. She could judge from a glance or the intonation of a word, or the raising of an eyebrow, while to Cortes and his officers, not yet familiar with the language or characteristics of the Tlascalans, there was no sign to warn them. As soon as she had more than mere intuition to go on, she sought Cortes.

"Master," she said, "these men are not heralds, but spies. Would it not be well for you to question them?"

"'Tis wisely spoken, Marina," he answered, his brow darkening.

So with the aid of Marina he put questions to the supposed envoys singly, until by means of the truths, half-truths and the lies they told, each unaware of what his companions might have revealed, Cortes gained the facts—that they had been sent by Xicotencatl to spy out the weaknesses of the Spanish camp in order that he might know how best to attack it.

When he was certain of this, Cortes determined upon an act which would prove to the Tlascalans and to Xicotencatl in particular, that they had no more chance of outwitting him by cunning than of conquering him by force.

From the top of his tree Ahuitzotl could see that something important was about to take place. He had no means of knowing whether the purpose of the Tlascalans had been discovered. He watched Fernando, who came from the Captain's tent to a spot almost beneath the tree in which he crouched, while he arranged by means of saddles, bags and mats covered with cloaks a kind of official dais and seat, which he knew must be destined for the use of Malinche. Ahuitzotl, moved by a sudden childish impulse, broke off a bit of twig and threw it down direct upon Fernando's head. When the Spanish boy glanced up into the thick foliage, the Aztec swung himself with agility around to the other side of the trunk.

"It must have been a monkey," said Fernando aloud to himself as he continued his setting of the stage for the ceremony.

A bugle called the camp together. The Indian allies were ordered to one side, the Spaniards to the other. The Tlascalans, Ahuitzotl could see, were under the weight of some un-

usual feeling, fear doubtless, he thought, in spite of their effort to appear unmoved. They had been discovered, he felt sure, and now the white leader was about to have them killed for their treachery; and the Aztec boy was all curiosity to see by what manner their punishment would come to them.

Fernando had just in that moment learned that the Tlascalans had entered the camp under false pretences. Diaz, the Castilian soldier, had told him all that he knew himself.

"They would have succeeded in getting away," he said to the boy as he helped him worm through the crowd to a hillock behind Cortes, where they could see all that would happen; "but the saints sent Marina, who nosed out their plots as a hound noses truffles. Their mothers and wives, though they be redder than Spanish women, can weep as well as any white Castilian dame, I warrant, and they'll shed many a tear, beshrew me, for this day's work."

"What will be done to them?" asked Fernando, "do you know, Bernal?" But his companion bade him to be quiet and listen to what Cortes was saying.

Cortes spoke in Spanish, and Marina translated his words into the Aztec tongue. If the angry phrases were somewhat softened by her woman's heart and voice, the Tlascalans felt the real import of the speech when they looked into the stern face of Malinche. They heard that he had discovered them and their plot, and they realized that there was no escape for them from his vengeance.

Ahuitzotl, leaning low from his branch, saw the white Cacique give an order, then one by one, each Tlascalan was made to kneel and place his hands on a stone before him. He saw a

soldier lift his sword and bring it down, severing the hands at the wrists.

"And he might have killed them?" exclaimed the Aztec boy under his breath, in amazement at this mild punishment; while the Spanish youth was overcome with horror.

"O! Bernal," cried Fernando, his voice trembling, "how could the Captain give orders for such a fearful punishment? In the battles we have fought I have not flinched at wounds and blood, but this is different."

"I am no friend of undue cruelty," said Diaz, "and Hernando Cortes is not one either. I would he had left the men their hands to fight us with; yet perhaps he has figured it out that it was necessary. Harken to his words."

"Go!" cried Cortes to the wretched men before him. "Hasten back to him who sent you. Show him and his friends the news your arms bear, and tell him that come as he may, by day or night, whenever it be, he shall find the Spaniards waiting."

When the gathering had dispersed and the normal life of the camp had begun again, Ahuitzotl knew that the time had come for him to be on his way back to Tenochtitlan to report to Montezuma. There was no longer a doubt that the Tlascalans were beaten, and now the Aztec statesmen could delay no longer in deciding what steps they would take against the alliance between the Teules and their ancient foes. But the boy had made up his mind that he would not return empty-handed. He would carry to his royal master some trophy of his stay in the camp of Malinche, a trophy that would make him the envy of every Aztec warrior.

There was little time left to get this—whatever it was to be. The sun had set and the short tropic twilight was almost at an end, and with the darkness Ahuitzotl must be on his way.

While he was wondering what he could secure, he saw Fernando bearing a sword which he knew belonged to Cortes. Then the page went into a tent and shortly after came out again with it, and sitting down where he could enjoy the cool evening air, began to rub and polish it with loving care. Ahuitzotl decided. What trophy could bring such fame to him as this weapon of the great Teule leader? Moreover, it would give him the chance he had been longing for—to test his strength against the strength of the Spanish boy.

He looked carefully about. Cortes and his officers were eating their supper together at the side of the camp farthest away from the spot where Fernando sat. Groups of soldiers dotted the space in between, but there were none between the tent and the stream that formed the left boundary of the camp except the sentinels who made the rounds of all its limits. The tree in which he perched was at the extreme right of the camp, so that he must encircle it all to reach the tent.

As soon as it was a little darker he slid to the ground, and running swiftly and silently, putting a wide distance between himself and the circle of sentinels, he reached the stream. As quietly as a beaver he slipped into the water at the point where two sentinels had met, waiting until they turned to go, each his return beat. In a few more paces he had reached the tent—but the boy and the sword were no longer there!

He listened intently, for the darkness was so dense that his

ears, more than his eyes, must serve him; and then he heard a slight noise from within the tent. A moment later the boy passed by him, on his way towards one of the camp fires on the right, almost brushing him as he went.

Now Ahuitzotl crept into the dark tent, and after satisfying himself that no one was inside, he began to feel with quick fingers along every inch of its side and of the ground for the sword. He touched soft cushions, the sharp points of spurs, the leaves of a book, the rim of a pewter goblet, the pommel of a saddle, and his feet tangled themselves in a cloak on the ground. He did not stop to wonder what purpose these objects, most of them unfamiliar to him, could serve; he knew only that they were not the sword.

At last he felt it, hanging to a nail. He jerked it down, ran to the entrance of the tent, and there, a few paces away, in a glow of light from the torch he had gone to fetch, came the Spanish boy. In the same moment Fernando saw the Aztec and in his hand the sword of Cortes. But before he could call out, the Aztec had leaped upon him, and the torch fell spluttering to the earth as the two boys rolled over and over together, Ahuitzotl still grasping the sword, but his arm not free to draw it. Fernando's one idea was to get the weapon back at any cost, just as Ahuitzotl's was to keep it.

With his left hand the Aztec felt for his antagonist's throat. He was sure that he was the stronger of the two and, when he pressed it, he realized joyfully that he could now throttle him. Fernando also was aware of this, and just as the iron fingers were closing on his windpipe he gave a desperate cry for help.

Bernal Diaz, sitting at the nearest camp fire, had idly

watched Fernando's torch as it fell, but he thought that the boy had tripped and would be up again in a moment. His attention had been diverted by a jest of one of his companions and he had turned his head away. Then came the boy's cry for help, and he sprang up first of all who responded to it and ran, guided by the glow of the expiring torch.

Ahuitzotl heard him running and knew that he must make his escape at once. With one tug, into which he put all his strength, he wrenched the sword from Fernando's fingers that had closed on it, hit him across the head with its heavy hilt, and dashed towards the stream. But Bernal Diaz was now between him and it, and behind the soldier a crowd of shouting men; and the sentinels, hearing the commotion, were hastening to the very point where he meant to cross.

The boy thought quickly. He knew that with the sword he could not swim under water, which was his only chance of escaping. So he threw it down clattering on the rocks and dived into the stream.

The torches flared upon the water; the sentinels fired in all directions in the hope that a stray bullet might hit the hidden thief, but without result. Fernando, who had regained consciousness after the blow, answered as best he could the questions put to him, and parties of men were posted at all points in case another attack on the camp were planned.

And Ahuitzotl, before the second night was over, had crossed the frontier back into his own country.

CHAPTER XI

Welcomed to Tlascala

FERNANDO was helping Cortes buckle on the sword which it had cost him so much to save. His bruised throat and shoulders kept him from forgetting the Aztec boy whose features he had seen for a second only before the torch fell from his hands.

News had come that more Tlascalan envoys were on the way to offer, this time humbly and openly, the submission of the Republic; and Cortes was preparing to receive them. His face was bright with satisfaction and he hummed the tune of a ballad of The Cid, that other great conqueror of Spain's pagan enemies. Fernando knew that at such times his master would not object to answer questions which he would not dare disturb him with when his thoughts were grave.

"Señor," he asked, "shall we not now break camp and march directly on the great city of Montezuma, now that we have conquered the Tlascalans?"

Cortes looked at the boy and smiled as one smiles at a child who has spoken foolishly.

"You have much to learn, lad," he said, "before you can call yourself a soldier, or at least if you have the ambition to be one of those who lead men and not one of those who are content to follow always other men's leading. One of the first things to know is that a commander must never leave the rear of his army in danger."

Cortes was in the mood for talking. The heavy weight had been lifted from his heart and he had need of speech. Fernando had shown several signs since the march began of the makings of a brave man and a capable soldier, and he was glad to help him to his future career by sharing with him his knowledge and experience. While Fernando knelt to fasten on his spurs, he continued:

"Do you think that a conquered foe, still sore at his defeat, is a safe defense behind one? I have conquered the Tlascalans; I have filled their hearts with terror; but they will bind up their wounds and it may be, though I scarce believe it likely, even forget their crippled envoys. What then ought I to do, Fernando?"

"I know not, Master," he answered.

"There is one thing that holds countries and armies together, which is greater than fear, which makes friends of men who have been foes. What is it, Fernando?"

"I cannot tell, Captain," replied the boy, shaking his head. "I am not wise enough to guess."

"If you would polish your wits as you polish my sword," said Cortes smiling, "you would not need to have me tell you. 'Tis mutual interest, boy, that holds us Christians here together in the midst of the heathen. If we stand together we

shall conquer. I believe even the friends of Velasquez yonder have learned that lesson at last. 'Tis mutual interest that keeps the Cempoallans our allies, and 'tis mutual interest which will make the Tlascalans our firm friends instead of our fierce foes. We have given them vinegar to drink; now we shall offer them honey. We must so deal with them that when we march on Tenochtitlan we shall have behind us those who will rejoice at our victories because they will be their victories also."

A bugle call told them that the Tlascalans were in sight. Fernando hurried out to bring up Cortes's horse, which the Captain General mounted. Down the road they could see a host advancing, but with measured steps, not the quick trot of the soldiers they had fought a few days before. Loud shouts went up as the Spaniards caught sight of the white and yellow liveries and pennants that had marked the thickest fighting on the battlefield.

"It is their Cacique Xicotencatl," cried Alvarado to Cortes, "the young warrior who fought us so bravely. If he be conquered, then in truth we have no more to fear from his countrymen."

It was a bitter moment for the brave Cacique when he advanced towards his former foes, not with spear or bow, but as the conquered before his victor. When he saluted Cortes, touching the ground with one hand and bringing the other to his forehead, his slaves cast sweet incense into a brazier and swung it around them both. Then Xicotencatl spoke and Marina quickly interpreted:

"Great Cacique of the white men, I am come to acknowledge that your weapons are greater than mine, that you have

conquered. Long before this day did the Council of the Republic agree to welcome you, but I would neither listen to their message nor obey them. It is I, and I alone, who must bear the weight of your displeasure for the battles I waged against you. Great Lord, Tlascala is dear to me. I said to myself; no stranger shall cross her boundary and live, and so I fought you by day and by night, by might and by cunning, until I saw that the gods had decreed victory to you. It may be, as some say, that you have been sent by the gods themselves according to the ancient prophecies. However it be, I pray that you will deal gently with the land which lies at your feet. For myself I ask nothing of you."

There was no one of the Spaniards who listened to this speech who was not moved by the brave words of a brave man. They knew that there was no more courageous fighter among themselves, and that, if they had not the advantage of artillery the issue of the battles would have been his victory. Cortes moved forward in chivalrous intent to embrace his gallant foe; then he suddenly halted, remembering that it was his policy to appear implacable, for a time at least.

"Had you believed in our words, Chieftain," he said, "there had been no need of fighting between us. Tlascala was in no danger from us, and you had not lost many hundred good men. Yet the past is gone, and a new day has come for your land. Let us forget our battles. You are now, as we are, subjects of our great Emperor Charles; and if you prove true, Spanish arms and Spanish guns will ever stand between you and your enemies. But"—here he raised his voice and his tone grew threatening—"if you prove false, we will take a

vengeance on your land and people more terrible than you have ever dreamed of."

Fernando had been listening intently in order that he might learn the method by which Cortes would proceed to make friends of the men he had humbled. The words to which he had listened did not seem to him calculated to please the Tlascalans. Still he knew that Cortes must have had his reason for saying them. "Perhaps," he thought, "he wishes first to frighten them."

Xicotencatl made no answer, but saluted once again and ordered his slaves to bring the gifts, small ornaments of gold and mantles of feather-work.

"We Tlascalans are a poor folk," he said; "we have little gold or cotton. Montezuma's soldiers have surrounded our borders and have left us naught save our freedom and our weapons. But what we offer is merely as a token of our goodwill."

Cortes answered in a tone so gentle, so different from the one of a few minutes before, that Fernando could hardly believe both could come from the same mouth.

"Brave Tlascalan," he said, "I accept your gifts as you give them. They are more welcome, as the present of brave and gallant warriors, than a house of gold from other hands. I have seen the courage of Tlascala's hosts and the skill and valor of their leader. They shine as does this gold and are of more worth to the land than mines of riches."

Now Fernando beheld an expression of gratification steal over Xicotencatl's features, and the boy realized that from now

now on Cortes would use kindness in all his dealings with Tlascala.

It did not take long for the report of the Spaniards' friendly attitude to reach the capital city. All along the way the Spaniards were greeted as allies by folk from the villages and small towns. When they neared the city itself the entire population came out to welcome them. Men and women bore great bunches of roses and other flowers which they thrust into the hands of officers and soldiers; others carried large wreaths of flowers that they wound about the necks of the horses who, as if understanding that they were now being admired instead of feared, paced gently along and seemed pleased to feel the soft brown Indian hands caressing their flanks. Priests in their long robes shook out incense from finely wrought pottery vessels before the Spaniards, and children danced and sang their welcome.

"Did you note the brow of our Captain," asked Alvarado, "when yon high priest bade him welcome in the name of the gods? I'll wager the time is at hand when he will no longer be content to leave the heathen to their cursed rites."

"There is no man amongst us," objected Sandoval, "who is not ready to fight for our blessed Faith. Yet I hold that it is wiser to proceed slowly, since the devils which abide in their idols will not let themselves be driven out at one blow. But it has been hard to bridle our Captain's religious fervor until now."

The joy of the Tlascalans increased as the Spaniards entered the city streets. Now that their leaders had made peace

with the Teules, the folk looked upon them as future allies against the Aztecs. The horses were now their horses too, who would terrorize the troops of Montezuma; the muskets and the wondrous cannon that rolled over the flower-strewn streets were their weapons which should win forever their freedom from Aztec aggression. This allegiance which their leaders had sworn to an emperor beyond the seas meant nothing to them.

Tlascala was larger than any Indian city the Spaniards had yet seen, and the narrow streets were closely built up with houses of stone or sundried brick. There were baths, the Spaniards noted with astonishment, a crowded market place, and signs everywhere of a population which was familiar with labor rather than with luxury. The city was divided into quarters, each one of which was ruled over by one of the four great Caciques who governed the Republic.

At the suggestion of Xicotencatl, Cortes was conducted before the mansion of his venerable father. The ancient chieftain stood in the gateway, and Cortes sprang from his horse and embraced him, allowing the blind Cacique to pass his questioning fingers over his face and garments that he might satisfy his curiosity in regard to the appearance of the man who had been victorious over his gallant son. Then he invited the Spaniards into a large hall in his palace and entertained them with a feast. Later that night they were conducted to the buildings and gardens near the great teocalli which had been made ready for them.

During the days that followed there was feast after feast, until there was no Spanish soldier who could complain that his

stomach had not had its fill. Cortes kept strict discipline, but food did not need a countersign to pass his sentries. He was pleased that his army should be well nourished and rested before he had need of it again.

The Tlascalans now proposed another way of binding their new allies to them. The chiefs offered their daughters as wives to Cortes and his officers. Now at last Cortes found the excuse for which he had been impatiently waiting to urge the Indians to give up their pagan beliefs and to listen to the teachings of Christianity.

"We can not mate with heathen," he said to them. "Our faith does not permit it. Listen while Father Olmedo explains the truths of our blessed religion."

The Indians listened gravely while the priest spoke to them of God, of the life and death of Jesus, of the saints, and of heaven and hell. He spoke eloquently, and the hearts of his own flock were stirred by the recital of the mysteries of their faith. While he recited the Creed, they chanted the Latin words after him, their hand upon the hilt of the sword, in token of their willingness to defend their belief with their lives. And the voice of Cortes was the firmest, his eyes the brightest.

There was little in the homily of the priest which the Tlascalans could grasp. But they could understand that what he preached was very near to the hearts of their new friends. When he had finished the Caciques spoke together and then bade the High Priest answer for them.

"Beyond a doubt," he said, "the god of the Christians of whom we have just heard is a great god and very powerful. We are glad to have listened to the words of his servant and

are eager to do honour to him. Tlascala has also many and great gods who are mightily to be feared and honoured. But they will not be jealous when we tell them that the god of the white men asks to come among them and to have prayers offered him from their teocallis."

"Nay," interrupted Cortes, "'tis not that which is required of you. The God of the Christians will be served and worshipped alone. He bids you forget the idols ye have worshipped until now and to give yourselves to His pure faith."

The High Priest answered in a tone which rose from earnestness to anger: "Shall a nation forsake the gods who have watched over it for ages; shall it leave cold the altars their fathers for generations have kept aglow? Behold, the white men honour their god; shall not we honour the gods which have led us to the Land of Bread and which have sustained us here? If we desert them for a new god they will pour out vengeance upon us. And not only the gods should we fear, but our own folk. From every village of the land a host of warriors would pour forth who would spill the blood of all those who would attempt to pull down the images of their ancient deities."

While he was speaking Alvarado glanced about him at the faces of the Tlascalans. He saw that their eyes were as aglow with fervor when the priest recited the sonorous names of their gods as the Christians had been during the chanting of the Creed. He realized that this people had been beaten on the battle field, but that every man, woman and child would indeed rise against their victors if the Spaniards were guilty of dis-

"BEHOLD THE STATUE OF THE GOD!"

honour to their gods. He saw too that the religious zeal of Cortes had blinded him to the danger of what would happen if he insisted upon the conversion of the Indians. He pushed nearer to him and laid his hand on the Captain's arm just as he was opening his lips to make an angry rejoinder to the High Priest.

"Wait, Cortes," he begged; "listen to Father Olmedo. We have no fear of martyrdom, as you well know; but is it not better to wait for it at least until we have converted the heathen?"

Cortes turned impatiently, but Olmedo's smile soon disarmed his anger.

"Listen, my son," he said, "doubt not that the Lord has given the heathen to be your inheritance, that He has reserved to us the blessed task of teaching them His holy gospel. But His day is not as our day. It was not by one miracle that Christ gained His disciples; and do you think to convert these people in one hour? Moses had ten wonders to perform before the heart of Pharaoh was softened. If we overturn the idols from their altars, what shall it avail if the idol be still enshrined in their hearts? And if the seed be planted one day, does the harvest come up on the morrow? The weapons of the Lord are not only zeal and courage, but patience and love. Let us make use of these and prepare the ground for the seed of faith."

Father Olmedo was not the only priest in the army, and his advice was not that of the others. Fiery, zealous, fanatical, they urged Cortes not to listen to his mild words, but to

make no concession to those who worshipped devils. But at last the combined efforts of Alvarado and Olmedo prevailed, and Cortes agreed to bide his time.

"Yet one thing shall be done at once," he declared. "Before we sleep the prisons filled with captives waiting to be sacrificed to their gods must be emptied."

The Tlascalans consented—it was an easy matter to let out at night those who could be recaptured the next morning, and in all ways possible they were eager to please their allies. They also looked on with interest and awe when the Spaniards placed a large cross in one of the public squares where they celebrated mass every morning. In a few days the daughter of one of the Caciques was baptized and given the name of Doña Louisa and was married to Alvarado. The Indians called him *Tonatiuh,* the Sun, on account of his fair hair and his bright manner.

For six weeks the Spaniards rested in Tlascala, and each day the friendship between the hosts and their guests increased. Fernando found endless amusement in going about the dark narrow streets, and dallying in the crowded market place, and in picking up the words of the Tlascalan tongue.

CHAPTER XII

The Teocalli at Cholula

IT was against the advice of the Tlascalans that Cortes, on his way to Montezuma's capital, chose the route which led through Cholula. The Cholulans, they told him, were a false folk whose words could not be trusted, men noted for cunning treachery rather than for the more warlike qualities of other Aztec tribes. But Cortes had decided, for reasons which he did not make public, to pass through the sacred city of the Aztecs and to behold the famous temple to Quetzalcoatl, revered by the Mexicans as their most ancient and important shrine. Moreover, he had already announced to the Cholulans his intention of visiting them, and it would have gone against his policy to leave unfulfilled any plan already given out. So the Spanish army, together with their Indian allies, increased by the six thousand Tlascalans whom Cortes had chosen from the hosts of those who volunteered to accompany him, set out for Cholula.

The city lay six leagues south of Tlaseala, and the two coun-

tries, always jealous of each other, were separated by mountains. These were crossed and the army descended into the wide fertile plain, watered by little canals which nourished the fields of maize and other crops raised by the industrious and wealthy Cholulans.

That evening Cortes encamped by a small stream and the next day made his entry into the city. Here he was welcomed by the inhabitants, who came to meet the Spaniards, bearing flowers and incense, and the visitors were installed in a palace composed of numerous buildings surrounded by a court and wall. The Spaniards observed the difference between Cholula and Tlascala. The former city was far more richly built, with wide, clean streets; the people wore richer garments and more ornaments, and the houses were larger, handsomer and the furnishings more ample and of finer materials. But it seemed to them that this folk of the plains—or rather tableland, since the city lay six thousand feet above the level of the sea—were less muscular, less active, less fit for war than the poorer mountain-bred Tlascalans.

The Spaniards could find no fault with their reception, and they thought the reputation given the Cholulans by their Tlascalan allies had been colored by jealousy. While Cortes kept the same strict discipline and careful guard over the guns and the horses, he allowed the officers and soldiers to wander about the city during the daytime.

Fernando took full advantage of this permission and, together with Bernal Diaz, went from street to street, stopping to glance into the houses where dark-eyed children stared back at him, fascinated by his white skin and light hair; bartering

with beads for fruit in the market-place, and standing aside to watch the numerous processions of priests and pilgrims, footsore but rejoicing at having reached the holy city to which they had travelled from their faroff towns. There were temples everywhere, and everywhere the smoke of incense rose into the clear autumn air, while the fragrance of blossoms, grown especially for the altars of the gods, filled the city.

"It is the Indian Jerusalem or Rome or Mecca, lad," commented Diaz. " 'Tis a pity to think of so many prayers and so many pilgrimages wasted by the heathen who seek to please their idols. We are blessed indeed to have been born in a Christian land."

It was owing to one of these processions that Fernando and Diaz became separated, borne apart by the pressing of the crowd. The boy, though very fond of the older soldier, was not sorry to have the chance to wander about for a while alone. His knowledge of the Indians' language had increased so much during his stay in Tlascala that he enjoyed stopping often to talk with those of all classes.

Before him rose the Great Teocalli, the temple which had been in sight for miles before they reached the city. He knew that it was the Holy of Holies of Anahuac, the far-famed shrine of Quetzalcoatl. The temple covered so much ground and rose to such a height that it did not seem possible to him that it could have been erected by human hands. He was almost inclined to believe what some of the town folk had told him, that the god himself had laid its foundations and upraised the mighty pyramid in the dim legendary past. White smoke curled from thousands of altars and brasiers, from fires

that had not gone out, night or day for hundreds of years, Marina had told him.

Fernando was eager to climb to the summit and to see for himself the wonderful statue of the God of the Air about which every Cholulan boasted. If he went with Cortes or other officers, he knew that he would find no chance of asking all the questions he wanted answered. Tales of enchanters, of giants, of Prester John and his kingdom, of the Antipodes, had been his daily food since the day he left his orphaned Spanish home to come to Cuba with an older brother, who had since died there of fever. In Mexico the boy's imagination was stimulated by marvels, but his appetite for them and curiosity about them grew stronger all the time. And on every side, from Cempoalla, from Tlascala and Cholula, he had heard of the size and sanctity of this wondrous temple.

As he mounted the steps which wound around the pyramid, the pilgrims stared at him and moved aside to let him pass. He caught an occasional word—"white as Quetzalcoatl—from the East," and he knew that they were speaking of the legend of the god and of his departure for the unknown East. As he climbed higher the fragrance of flowers grew stronger until it made his head giddy and the incense was so thick that the upper terraces were hidden in a white cloud. Suddenly a sensation of strangeness overwhelmed him, and he grew keenly aware of being cut off from everything to which he belonged. The surroundings, the people, the language were such as no imagination could have conjured up. He felt as if it all must be a dream, and that he would awake in Spain or Cuba. For a moment he thought of turning back. He longed to hear

the sturdy voice of Bernal Diaz ring out in good Castilian. Then the sensation of vague terror passed as suddenly as it had come, and he climbed on eagerly.

News of the approach of one of the Teules had been brought to the priests on the summit, and when Fernando reached the upmost level on which were the different altars and shrines, a priest with wreaths of flowers about his neck and descending to the hem of his white robe met him with words of welcome. The boy answered in the Aztec tongue.

"You are come to see the temple of Quetzalcoatl," said the old priest, whose hair was as white as his robe, "or perchance you bring a message from the god, sent to me from his eastern isle whither the savor of our sweet sacrifices has been wafted pleasantly unto his nostrils."

"Nay, Teoa," said another priest, much younger than the first. "This is no divine messenger from Quetzalcoatl, but one of the strangers who visit now our land."

Over the mild features of Teoa passed a puzzled expression. Then he put out his hand to Fernando, saying:

"Come, whoever you are, and behold the statue of the god."

He led him into the largest of the shrines. The polished wood of its walls was carved with minute images and symbols. It was darkened by the smoke of innumerable years. In the centre, upon a great carved stone pedestal, stood the sacred image of Quetzalcoatl, God of the Air. Upon his head was a mitre waving with sculptured plumes of fire, rays to imitate the winds; a collar of gold was about his neck; earrings of turquoise hung from his ears. In one hand he bore a jewelled sceptre and in his other a shield.

Fernando gazed curiously at the shrine and statue of which he had heard so much. He and Teoa were alone, though other priests stood at the doorway. Teoa had prostrated himself on the ground in front of the statue and was chanting what Fernando knew must be prayers. Then he rose and, taking the wreaths from his neck, laid them at the feet of the god.

Fernando, remembering his horror at the different kind of offerings he had shuddered at in the teocallis he had entered on the march, and having feared that here he might witness the same, was greatly relieved. The kind eyes of the aged priest, the gentle voice and this offering of flowers showed him a new side of the Aztec religion. Above the head of the statue the roof of the temple was open and the blue sky shone through, reassuringly familiar in these strange surroundings.

"It is a pure worship, this of our mighty God of the Air," said Teoa, and Fernando could see that the priests' words were directed only partly to him, and were spoken in a kind of mystic absorption. Then, becoming conscious again of his companion, he said:

"You shall tell me now of the message the god has delivered to you for me, his servant and son of his servants, who from father to son, have served him as priests in this shrine since it was built so many cycles ago that no man can number them. He knows in truth how my spirit has longed for this word."

Fernando was at a loss what to answer, when the younger priest came and said something to Teoa, who turned to Fernando and spoke:

"I must leave you, Messenger, but you will come again soon at this hour to bless mine ears with the divine words."

When Fernando followed Teoa outside he intended to enter some of the smaller shrines, but he saw that the sun was near the horizon, and the aspect of the other priests seemed to him suddenly sinister. Above the fragrance of flowers came the odor of some burning substance which offended his senses strangely. He hurried down the steps of the teocalli as rapidly as he could without jostling the worshippers who were still climbing them. He drew a long breath of relief when he was once again on the level and saw some of his countrymen a few feet away.

For several days the Cholulans entertained the Spaniards lavishly, supplying their table with food of all kinds. But after the evening when Marina informed them that messengers from Montezuma had come to the Caciques of the city there was a notable change. The supply of provisions was lessened; the Caciques no longer came to their quarters, and when they walked through the city they were not greeted as on the first days. Men looked at them and turned away quickly.

Cortes was disturbed by these symptoms of unfriendliness and wondered if it might not have been wiser to have followed the Tlascalans' advice and chosen another route. The Indian allies, only a few of whom he had allowed to accompany him into the city, added to his anxiety by telling him that they had observed barricades recently thrown up in the streets, and had seen upon the flat roofs of a number of houses large piles of stones that would be effective weapons in case of street fight-

ing. They informed him too that a stream of women and children had passed out of the city gates.

"What do you think of all this, Alvarado?" asked Cortes.

"Little indeed, Señor," answered Alvarado, smiling. "Our allies love not the folk here and would doubtless enjoy nothing better than to see a skirmish. Streets torn up that new houses may be built belike, and stones for building them stored close by—out of this they would manufacture cause for fear."

"But our straitened food supply?" suggested Cortes.

"We are no longer a new thing to them," Alvarado said as he walked idly up and down the chamber; "and so why weary themselves by bringing us enough meat and fruit to feed the court of the Emperor at Toledo? We are not likely to starve yet with our present rations."

Cortes let himself be partly reassured by Alvarado's reasoning, but he determined to leave Cholula, and with or without permission from Montezuma, to march upon Tenochtitlan without further delay.

Since their arrival in the city Marina had been much sought after by the wives of certain of the higher Caciques. They had been most eager to learn from her about the wonderful Malinche and his people, and she in turn had enjoyed chatting once more with those of her own race. The same day on which Cortes and Alvarado had talked together one of these women met Marina in the market place whither she had gone to buy a veil and scarf. She begged her to come home with her, and when they were seated and had been served by a slave with sweet cakes and chocolate, the woman said:

"Stay with me here tonight, Marina; it will be better for you than if you should return to the palace of the Teules."

"Nay, but there is nothing lacking in the palace of the white men," answered Marina.

"Naught perchance save safety," added the woman half under her breath. "Yet it matters not," she continued, "why I desire your company, only promise me that you will abide here with me who have learned to love you so."

Marina's wits were quick and keen. She was convinced that the woman was in possession of certain information which she determined to get from her. It did not take a minute to lay her plans.

"Will you in truth let me hide here until the hated strangers are gone?" she asked. "For weeks have I looked for a chance to escape from them who have kept me prisoner."

"Since that is so," replied the Cholulan woman, moving her chair closer to Marina, "I can tell you what will give you pleasure. Tomorrow, by the desire of Montezuma, who has sent presents to all our chief Caciques, the Teules will be set upon as they march out of the city, and in the crowded streets our warriors say they will have no chance to make use of their strange beasts and fire-breathing weapons. Beyond the city lie thousands of Aztecs ready to aid our men if it should be necessary."

"And when the white men are overcome what will be done with them?" asked Marina eagerly. "I would be sure that they could never again get hold of me. You know not the strange power they wield with the words of their devil tongue and the magic of their god."

She shivered, and her fear seemed so genuine that her hostess tried to comfort her.

"Fear not, Marina. They will never trouble you more. The captives will be sacrificed in the temples. It is already planned that many will be offered in the shrines here, but Malinche will be taken to the teocalli in Tenochtitlan."

"That is good news," said Marina rising. "In truth you are my friend. I will hasten back to put together a few garments and then steal to you here within an hour."

Once outside the house, Marina walked as rapidly as she could without attracting attention. She met Fernando and asked if Cortes were within the palace. In her excitement she failed to notice that the boy himself was leaving the garden in which the Captain General's quarters were set. She hurried to Cortes's apartments and entered without ceremony.

"Señor," she cried, breathing hard with excitement and haste, "I have brought you evil tidings."

"What is it, Marina?" asked Cortes. "If you are warning us once again before it has happened then is half the evil gone. The saints bless you, Marina; but tell me what is planned. I have known that there was something plotted against us."

Then Marina repeated word for word what the Cacique's wife had revealed to her, while Cortes paced the floor, the vein in his forehead swelling as always when he was greatly moved. He realized that he was caught, that his situation was the gravest he had been in since he had set foot in Mexico. By allowing himself to be cooped up in a city with enemies in every street and others just beyond the gates, he had neglected, he knew, the precautions he should have scolded one of

his lieutenants for not taking. He had been too easily deceived by the Cholulans' apparent friendliness. However, no matter how much he might blame himself, he lost no time in useless words.

He sent messengers hurriedly to certain priests of a temple some leagues away whom he had seen on his march to Cholula, and who, he had learned, were credited with great wisdom and authority. The messengers were bidden to be secret and to promise valuable presents to the priests if they would come at once. When they arrived Cortes, by aid of Marina's diplomacy, made them understand that if they would give him the information he desired he would double the valuable gifts he put into their hands. They told him that Montezuma had at first sent word to the Cholulans to welcome the Spaniards; then, when the Aztec priests had consulted the oracles and declared that the gods had decreed that the Teules should perish in Cholula, he had reversed his commands and ordered the revolt which was about to break out.

Cortes sent for the ambassadors from Montezuma and told them that he had discovered a plot to destroy him and his army. The Aztecs protested that their sovereign knew nothing of this, that the Cholulans alone were to blame. Cortes pretended to believe this, as he was anxious to avoid an open break with Montezuma.

The night was an anxious one for all the Spanish army. Cortes commanded his officers to be prepared for any rising in the city and to hold everything in readiness to march as soon as dawn would make it possible for them to find their way through the streets. So anxious a time was it for Cortes him-

self, who was planning and giving orders on every side, that he did not notice the absence of Fernando.

When Marina had stopped Fernando to question him about Cortes's whereabouts, the boy was on his way to the great teocalli. He had been there several times since his first visit. Teoa and the shrine exerted over him a strange kind of attraction. At times the venerable priest understood clearly that the boy was one of the Teules whose coming had so disturbed the city; at other times he would greet Fernando with reverence as the veritable messenger of Quetzalcoatl. He liked to talk to him and always about the teocalli and his long service there. He told him that the god himself had ordained the pure worship of flowers, incense, song and prayer. The human sacrifices offered the other gods were practices, he explained, which had been introduced by the Aztecs, who were late comers to the land compared to his own ancestors, the Mayas. He told such interesting stories of Quetzalcoatl that Fernando was never tired of listening. The wonderful view from the top of the great pyramid, with the snow-covered volcanoes of Iztaccihuatl and Popocatepetl, the sensation that there was no one else, Spaniard or Cholulan, who was admitted as he was freely to the inner shrine of the god, and the gentle manner of the priest—all these combined drew Fernando to the teocalli whenever his duties left him free for an hour or so.

This evening he intended to bid farewell to Teoa, as he knew that Cortes had given orders to march on the morrow. When he reached the summit, the younger, fierce looking priest who,

he had learned, was called Chimalpopoca, came forward and peering into his face, asked:

"Wherefore do you come here, Teule?"

"To talk with Teoa, the High Priest," answered the boy, who tried not to show the feeling of repugnance Chimalpopoca always excited in him.

"He is yonder," pointed the priest. "Enter and behold him offering his *pure* sacrifice to the god. Shall Quetzalcoatl be content with naught but the perfume of flowers?" he asked scornfully.

Fernando turned with relief into the shrine, and when Teoa had finished his prayers he made a low reverence before the boy. Fernando could see that the old priest had grown older even since his last visit, and that his gentle wits were even less in his keeping than before.

"Hail, blessed messenger," he cried. "What word sends the God of the Air by you to his faithful servant? For fourscore years have I served him, have brought to his altar the offerings he delights in. Soon shall I journey to him; but before I close mine eyes for the last time I fain would know that I have found favor with him. Answer, Messenger, is it so?"

And Fernando, the Christian, who could not bear to disappoint the longing of the heathen's heart, answered:

"Yes, you have found favor with him, Teoa."

He knew that it was no use while the priest was in this state of mystic absorption to explain that he had come to bid him farewell. But he laid his hand on the head of the kneeling priest as if to emphasize Quetzalcoatl's favor; and then, lift-

ing the curtain at the entrance of the shrine, started out to descend to the second terrace. As he reached the corner by the steps, he felt himself seized from behind. A scarf was twisted over his mouth and eyes; he was lifted up by strong arms and borne rapidly into some enclosed space, and thrown with such force to the ground that he lost consciousness.

CHAPTER XIII

The Sacrificial Stone

IN the dark cell where Fernando came to consciousness all was as silent as if he were hidden in the bowels of the earth. For a moment he could not tell where he was nor remember what had happened to him. It must be time, he thought, to light the torches and serve Cortes's supper; then he wondered whether his master had missed him. His mind now picked up the thread of the afternoon's events. He recalled the anxious face of Marina as she had hurried past him, the ascent of the teocalli, his feeling of repugnance as Chimalpopoca bent over him, his farewell to Teoa, and then the unexpected assault from behind. He had not seen his assailant, but he was certain that it was none other than Chimalpopoca, and that his dread of him had been justified.

He could not tell how long he had lain unconscious. Still suffering from bruises, he got to his feet and began to feel about the walls of his prison. It was not more than ten by eight feet, he judged, and was covered as far as he could reach with intricate carvings. He felt it over, inch by inch, in the hope of

finding an opening; but the opening, wherever it was, was so cunningly concealed that he was unable to discover it. There were, he knew, several small rooms on the summit of the teocalli, in addition to the innumerable apartments at its base, which served for storing away the sacrificial robes and utensils, or as rest rooms for the priests. At least, this was the purpose Fernando had ascribed to the rooms he had never been allowed to enter.

He wondered whether Teoa knew where he was and whether his kindness to him had been but the playing of a part, the better to deceive him. Yet he did not believe this possible. Even if the High Priest had not looked upon him as sent by Quetzalcoatl, his gentle nature, the boy felt sure, abhorred all violence. He had seen him shudder when he spoke of the human sacrifices offered in other temples throughout Anahuac to the God of War. Doubtless those who had brought him where he was had acted without Teoa's knowledge, and whatever they planned to do to him they meant to keep from his friend.

Fernando shivered. The terror which seized him was as sharp as physical pain. All the vague feelings of oppression and fear that he had experienced when he first mounted the steps of the teocalli and had seen the eyes of Chimalpopoca fixed upon him, now merged together and were multiplied a thousandfold. If he could only have a light, he thought, he would be braver. He felt as if he were not alone in the cell, yet when he moved to make sure he found no one. He longed for someone to come and tell him what fate awaited him, so he cried out as loud and as long as he could, but no one came.

He was sure that days must have gone by and that it was

intended to starve him to death. But in fact his imprisonment had lasted only eight hours when he felt himself lifted from the ground on which he had crouched. He shrieked with surprise and terror. He had heard no one, no sound of the opening wall, no footstep behind him. A scarf was bound about his mouth and he was carried out into the open air. He caught sight of brilliant stars in the black sky above and the flames of several ever-burning altars. Then he was borne into what he knew must be one of the smaller shrines, and by the light of a torch stuck in one corner, he beheld a statue of Quetzalcoatl, similar in design to the famous idol, only smaller and darkened by the smoke of years.

He saw too that it was indeed Chimalpopoca who had bound and carried him. The priest lighted the other torches, the glow of which illumined the shrine. In place of walls were heavy curtains of cotton on which were painted scenes from the history of the god. There were no flowers before the statue, but hanging on poles about it and from the beams which formed a roof with an opening in it to let out the smoke, there were innumerable small dark objects. Fernando gazed at these in horror, for he had heard from Marina that the hearts of human sacrifices were thus preserved in the teocallis.

"But surely," he said to himself, while Chimalpopoca was busy in making preparations for some deed he dared not let his imagination dwell on, "surely this is the shrine of Quetzalcoatl, the god who taught the Aztecs all that is highest in their civilization, whose altars are pure of the awful sacrifices offered to the God of War." Yet in his heart he knew that Teoa's words had not told the truth. From his first visit to the teocalli

the faces of the other priests, the strange odor of burning flesh should have warned him of what went on in the shrines. Now he knew!

He watched with terrified eyes the preparations Chimalpopoca was making. At a signal from him slaves staggered in with a huge stone block and laid it before the statue. Now at another signal they approached him. He tried to cry out, but the scarf muffled every sound. He kicked out wildly and beat his arms like flails in their faces, but his blows were as ineffectual as drops of rain on a rock. They lifted him from the ground, slipped off his jerkin, hose and under garments, and, carrying him naked to the stone, they laid him on it. It was slightly curved so that his head and legs hung down. The slaves then fastened his wrists and ankles into grooves cut out of the polished stone for this purpose. Then slaves and Chimalpopoca lifted up the curtain and left him alone.

Fernando's heart beat as if it were eager to put into these few last moments the beats of a lifetime. His mind no longer had to face dread possibilities but the dire certain fate that awaited him. He wondered again if Teoa could have lied to him with his words, his smiles, his apparent gentleness. Through the opening in the roof he could see that the stars were paling. Doubtless the sacrifice would be offered at dawn, the sacrifice that was now so full of life! He looked up at the idol before him and shuddered as he imagined he saw it leer back at him. Then he began to pray, fervent prayers to Christ and all the saints, to save him, or if that might not be, to bear his soul to the Christian heaven.

He saw the curtain being slowly lifted, and priests filed

in until the shrine was full. Chimalpopoca, clothed in a blood-red robe, came the last, and the light of the torches flashed back from the polished black stone knife he bore in his hand. Slaves swung incense and the priests chanted a hymn to the great God of the Air, that he would be pleased to accept this rare offering, and in token of his pleasure, ward from his own city of Cholula the dangers which threatened it. The slaves rolled up the curtains, that had been flapping gently in the faint breeze which announced the dawn, and Chimalpopoca approached the stone.

Fernando closed his eyes. Boy though he was, he had not shrunk from death on the battlefield, but this awful death he could not face. He felt the hand of Chimalpopoca at his breast. In another second the knife would have done its work.

Then he felt Chimalpopoca start, and he heard the voice of Teoa, but firm and stern and angry as he had never heard it before:

"What means this profanation? Truly did the god awaken me from my slumbers before the accustomed hour, that I might save his altar from this horror. Is he Huitzilopotchli, that ye offer him quivering human flesh instead of fruit and flowers? Loosen at once the youth and leave this sanctuary, all ye faithless servants, that I may cleanse it and escape the wrath of Quetzalcoatl!"

The dreamy look in the High Priest's eyes had vanished; now perhaps for the first time in many years he was fully aware of what went on about him. Chimalpopoca, seeing this, knew that the time had come for him to explain.

"Fear not, Teoa," he said scornfully, though he made the

customary humble obeisance to the High Priest, "that the god will be angry because we offer him this sacrifice. Long ago he wearied of your flowers and for years now he has delighted in the flavor of human hearts. Though you are the High Priest and the son of high priests, you have not known what went on in this temple. Your nostrils were too full of the fragrance of flowers to smell the smoke of the burnt offerings; your eyes were holden by age that you should not behold the captives who awaited the moment of sacrifice. And in the night when you were asleep I, the chief priest next to you, did perform the duties of mine office."

Chimalpopoca ceased for a moment to listen to a sound which came from the street far below, and Teoa, like one awakening from a dream, turned to the other priests and asked:

"Has he spoken the truth?"

In token of his truth-telling, Chimalpopoca lifted down a string of dark dried objects and would have placed it in Teoa's hand had he not drawn back shuddering.

"The hearts of Quetzalcoatl's offering," said the younger priest simply.

The noise below had increased to such an extent that even to the high shrine came, though veiled, the cries of those in the streets. Chimalpopoca smiled as if pleased.

"Let us hasten," he said, "that Quetzalcoatl may be glad of this offerings and grant success to what is planned."

But Teoa had taken his stand beside the altar. At the nearer sight of the white body of the sacrifice he had started back.

"Oh! horrors of horrors!" he cried. "Not only have you profaned the shrine of the god who came to teach men gentleness and the culture of the fields, but you dare to slay his very messenger. Loose him before Quetzalcoatl smites you before his own altar."

No one stirred. The outward respect they had always shown to the High Priest had for years covered in many of the priests a scorn for the gentleness which was so contrary to their own natures. Yet even now some of them trembled a little, retaining the superstitious awe of the miraculous powers which were supposed to be hereditary in Teoa's family.

Not so Chimalpopoca. He had not even listened to the older priest's words but had been harkening to the uproar which increased each moment. Added to the cries was a dull roar which seemed to come from all parts of the city. Now he turned and, laying his hand on Teoa, shoved him aside.

"There is no time now to be lost," he cried. "Dawn is past and day is here. The god waits above and the Caciques below for the signal that they may expect the divine blessing. Hear you not how the folk have risen against the Teules? Montezuma and our leaders have planned that neither Malinche nor his army shall see this day's sunset."

Again he drew his black knife and touched the boy's breast with its sharp edge, as if to feel out the best spot. Then came a mighty roar from the streets which stayed his hand.

"An earthquake!" cried the priests.

"The angry voice of Quetzalcoatl," murmured Teoa.

"The guns!" thought Fernando.

Terrific shrieks followed, and the temple slaves hurried into

the shrine, crying out "Help! Help! There is fighting and terrible death all about us."

Chimalpopoca rushed to the steps, followed by all except Teoa, who knelt down before the shrine and prayed fervently.

Fernando dared not open his eyes for a moment. He felt that he should see the horrible face of Chimalpopoca above him. When he did open them he saw that he was alone except for the kneeling High Priest. He called to him, for the scarf had been removed when he was laid on the altar; but Teoa was once again lost to the outside world. Fernando listened and could hear that feet were flying down the stairs of the teocalli, and he knew that for a few moments he was safe. He tried to imagine what was happening in the city. He made a guess that Cortes had discovered the plot against him and that he had attacked first or had been ready to beat back the Cholulans when they attacked him. The guns told him that the Spaniards were clearing the streets. He believed they would be able to force their way through whatever host was opposed to them; he had seen the panic among the Tlascalans when the guns mowed down their comrades. They would force their way out of the city, but it would not save him. He would be dead before Cortes's work that day was done, and doubtless Cortes would never know the fate of his page, but would think he had fallen fighting.

"O blessed saints, what a sweet death were that!" cried out the boy in an agony of dread.

Again he tried to make Teoa hear him. If the priest could loosen him might he not escape by some secret passage known to the High Priest? But Teoa's ears, which had not heard his

call, now caught the shrieks from below. He seemed to awaken once more from the sleep of years and to realize that hostile feet were attempting to gain a footing on the steps of his beloved temple. He rushed out beyond the shrine, calling:

"Arm yourselves, arm yourselves, you priests, and defend the house of the god. Here, Chimalpopoca, to my side. Quetzalcoatl bids me fight for him."

By turning his head to one side, Fernando was able to see a portion of the terrace and the head of the stairs. He could see Teoa in his trailing white robe and Chimalpopoca with a breastplate over his red robe which he had looped up with his girdle, leaving his legs bare and free, a spear in one hand and a shield in the other, followed by fifty young priests, all hastily armed with whatever they could find, knives, spears, and even heavy objects of temple furniture to hurl down on the foe below, already engaged by an army of priests and slaves on the lower terraces. They rushed to the parapet and down the stairs and, judging by the sound of their footsteps as he could hear them going round each descending terrace, Fernando knew that they must have reached the level of the street.

There was a slight lull, then again he heard the reverberation of the cannon, the rattle of musquetry and the shrieks of the Cholulans. His ears distinguished the battle-cry of his countrymen, "St. James! St. James!" He caught the sound of blows on metal, of weapon on weapon at the foot of the temple, and heard ascending steps, so he concluded that the priests had been driven to the second level.

He could not see anything that was going on; only above him the brilliant sky up which the sun had already climbed far,

and the white summit of one of the great volcanoes. There was no human being left in the shrine. The thousands of priests were all below. Fernando pulled in desperation, trying to free his arms, but with no avail. The braziers on which incense had been thrown sent forth their heavy clouds of fragrant smoke which almost stifled him.

He could not tell what hopes there might be for a Spanish victory. He did not know that Cortes, after learning from Marina the plot of the Cholulans, had summoned their principal Caciques and taxed them with what he called their treachery. Then he had turned the cannon upon them, slaughtering them by the hundreds, and the fighting had spread through all the city streets. Fernando knew that Cortes had left the Tlascalan allies outside the city, in order that the presence of their hereditary foes might not offend the Cholulans. If these had been able to come to the rescue of the Spaniards he believed they would not be so hopelessly outnumbered.

Then suddenly below him he caught the battle-cry of the Tlascalans, the cry of Xicotencatl's retainers. Only a few weeks ago those who uttered it had done their utmost to kill the white men; now they were fighting side by side with them. He listened more intently than ever. As the noise grew stronger he knew that the priests had again been driven to the level above. But there they made a firm stand, reinforced by the slaves who had been stationed there; and the sun was almost directly over his head before he heard this platform abandoned and the priests again retreat. He listened to Chimalpopoca calling out his commands, and he shrank at the sound of this voice and the thought that even though the Spaniards and

Tlascalans should win in the end, there would be time before their coming for the priest to finish the sacrifice he had begun.

Another half hour and the remaining terraces had been lost by the defenders. So close below him was the fighting now that Fernando could easily distinguish the voices and cries of the Cholulans and of the Tlascalans. He knew that there were no Spaniards amongst the assailants, but the cries and shots from the streets told him they were busy elsewhere. He could even hear the bodies as they fell and struck the third terrace in their fall. Then there came a great rush and he saw the priests swarming over the parapet. Some rushed to the statue of the god, some to hide in the dark cells like the one in which he had been imprisoned, while the majority massed to dispute the parapet to the last.

He beheld Teoa, his white robe almost as red now as that of Chimalpopoca's, his eyes dazed, turn as one who had lost his way, searching for the shrine which he had so faithfully served all his life. But instead of finding it, he entered the one where the boy lay. The sight of him brought back to the ancient priest the horror of his discovery that he had been so duped and the god's shrine so desecrated. He stood still a moment before the bloodstained altar, then cried in a voice of anguish:

"Quetzalcoatl! Blessed god! Forgive your servant who could not preserve your altar from profanation and from the hands of the enemy."

Then Fernando saw him rush to the parapet with the lightness of a boy, and with horror beheld him leap out into the air, to fall to the ground far below.

Even as he had done this the Tlascalans swarmed up over the

steps; against their superior numbers and trained force even the fierceness of Chimalpopoca and his followers was of no avail. They fought as bravely as men can fight, but the Tlascalans were victorious and soon had bound together all who were still alive.

Cries of astonishment told Fernando that he had been discovered. He looked up into the face of the young Cacique Xicotencatl. Then he fainted, and when he came to himself he was lying on the ground unbound, a warrior's cape over him. But he managed to answer Xicotencatl's questions as to how he came there and to pour out hurried words of thanks for his rescue.

The young Cacique gave his orders. His soldiers loosened for a moment the cord which bound the prisoners together, and took out Chimalpopoca. They stripped him of his robe and then threw him upon the sacrificial stone. And before Fernando, who had not yet completely recovered his wits, could protest, a Tlascalan priest had cut open his breast, pulled out his heart and cast it into the fire which was to have received the heart of Fernando. All the Tlascalans cried out loud words of triumph and praise to the gods for victory.

CHAPTER XIV

In Sight of the Goal

IT was with real joy that Cortes greeted his page again when Xicotencatl brought Fernando to the palace, whither the Cacique went to report to his ally that the Great Teocalli, the heart of the city, was captured. The Captain General, even in the hours of his anxiety, had had time to worry over the absence of the boy, and had sent Bernal Diaz with five soldiers in search of him through such portions of the city as were held by the Spaniards. Now when he saw Fernando in his strange costume and had listened to the boy's excited account of his danger and his rescue, Cortes stepped towards the Cacique with that smile that endeared him to so many and said:

"You have indeed made of me your debtor this day, O Chief. Not only have you conquered the temple by your valor, but you have given back to me the life of this, my page."

" 'Tis a valiant young warrior," replied the Cacique shortly, and strode away.

Fernando, strengthened by food and drink, was present at the Council which now took place. Sandoval, Alvarado, de

Avila and all of Cortes's officers related their stories of what they had seen and done in their parts of the contest. Fernando wished that it might not have been considered necessary to massacre the Cholulans drawn up in the square; but the Spanish leaders justified themselves by saying that only by a sudden blow of this kind had they got the upper hand. Each officer had a different tale to tell of being cornered in narrow streets, where javelins and stones rained on them from the roofs; of the quick terror that seized the Cholulans when the cannon and muskets sent forth the mysterious death into their ranks, and of the relief they felt when the Tlascalans, with wreaths of sedge about their heads, to distinguish them from the Cholulans, appeared to join their strength to their own.

But there was no one whose recital excited as much attention as Fernando's. Father Olmedo listened eagerly when the boy explained the difference between the older and the later worship of Quetzalcoatl.

"I would I might have talked with that Teoa," he said regretfully. "It seems to me that it had not been difficult to have proved to such a man the truths of our blessed faith."

"Waste not your desire for talk with the dead, Father," interrupted Cortes. "Rather let us make haste to convert the living. The day has at last dawned when we shall drive the devils out of this land and bring this pagan folk into the fold of the Church."

The eyes of the Captain General blazed with religious fire, and all present, with two exceptions, shared his belief that the conversion of the heathen was about to be accomplished.

"But". . . exclaimed Fernando; and then suddenly con-

scious that the word had been uttered aloud, he tried to hide behind Alvarado's broad back.

"But what, boy?" asked Cortes, beckoning to him.

Fernando, all shamefaced, answered:

"I crave your pardon, Señor; I was but thinking that men who could fight for their gods as I saw them fight on the teocalli would not change their belief even if threatened by death."

Cortes frowned, and while he was weighing his reply, Father Olmedo spoke:

"The lad says wisely, Captain. Men can not be convinced in a minute. Even our gracious sovereigns, Ferdinand and Isabella, respected the faith of the Moors when they conquered their kingdom. In truth, you can not doubt that the wish nearest to my heart is to baptize the Indians, but let us give time for the blessed seed of faith to ripen."

"The father is right," said Sandoval. "Moreover, should we use force here to make Christians of the Cholulans we would leave behind us an enemy in every one of the thousands of priests who swarm here."

Again against his will Cortes was forced to postpone conversion; but he entered eagerly into the suggestion of Father Olmedo's to plant a huge Cross on the summit of the teocalli. It was rapidly built of stone and plaster and erected on the very spot where Fernando had lain bound. The priest, through Marina, explained to the gaping Cholulans the meaning of this symbol. It stood high above the shrines, many of which had been destroyed during the combat, and could be seen from all parts of the city.

Cortes was not content with this effort and determined to prevent any further human sacrifices. He had learned from Fernando that all the prisoners captured by the Tlascalans were destined to this fate. He sent for the principal Caciques, and forced them, against their will, to surrender their captives. Xicotencatl alone among them refused.

"I have already sent those whom my arms won for me to our gods in Tlascala," he answered haughtily, "and Xicotencatl will never ask back from the gods what he has given them."

The young Tlascalan in truth showed little inclination to play the part of the humbled conquered towards the captor; and Cortes, sure that for the time at least his desire to fight the Aztecs would keep the Cacique their ally, if not their friend, did not resent this proud attitude.

The only Spaniard to whom Xicotencatl showed courtesy was Fernando. He would ask questions of him regarding the discipline and drill of the troops, and in turn would explain the simpler evolutions of his mountain forces. On the march towards Tenochtitlan, which now had really begun, he would call Fernando to his side, and as they walked along, his yellow and white plumes waving about his shoulders and his rough cloak of hare's fur woven with cotton thrown back during the heat of the day, the boy could not help thinking that, different as he looked, he was as fine a figure of a soldier as Alvarado himself.

The Cacique was oftener silent than not, yet at times he would relate stirring tales of Tlascalan history. And one day he told Fernando of the gallant enemy he hoped to find again

in Tenochtitlan—the son-in-law of Montezuma, and of how they had sworn to fight each other.

"You did not know, little White Warrior," he said almost affectionately, "that I too had nearly been sacrificed on a strange altar from which I too escaped?"

"And yet," replied Fernando puzzled, "you have sent many Cholulans to die the same death in Tlascala."

" 'Tis the fortune of war," explained the Cacique. "And had I been old as some of them were I had not sought to escape. It is a quick road to the gods. But I am young, and the blood beats too strongly in my veins to be stilled yet."

Now that Cholula lay conquered behind them, Cortes felt that the last part of the journey to Montezuma's capital had begun in earnest. Before leaving the city he had received other envoys from the Aztec monarch and he had pretended to believe that Montezuma regretted the Cholulan outburst against the Spaniards.

He did not need the warning of his allies to know that it would not be wise to trust to the fair words of the Aztecs. At one part of the march he came to two roads, one of which had been blocked by trunks of recently felled trees. When he inquired of the Mexicans why this had been done they told him that it was by order of Montezuma, to prevent the Spaniards taking a road which would be impassable for their horses and their guns. Nevertheless Cortes determined to go by this way, as it was the most direct road to Tenochtitlan, and also just because it was the road which Montezuma would not expect him to take. He set the soldiers to removing the trees,

and soon had the road clear. It led them always up into the mountains, and the air grew colder and colder.

"It is worse than the Pyrenees," exclaimed Alvarado, drawing his mantle closer about him.

"Look, yonder, what sight is that?" cried Cortes, letting the reins fall on his horse's neck as he pointed ahead.

A huge white peak rose between them and the sky, its white slopes spreading across many miles. From its summit a cloud of thinner white, a vapor shot through with red flames, curled against the blue sky.

"It is snow," cried Cortes in amazement, "and there are flames upon it. Saw man ever such a marvel? What is it called, Marina?"

"It is the great volcano, Señor," the girl answered, "Popocatepetl, ' the hill that smokes' as men call it. There is fire in its heart that is never quenched. 'Tis said that those emperors and caciques who on earth have ruled cruelly are imprisoned therein, and that the horrid sounds and awesome rumbles that can be heard afar off come from their outcries in their torments. And there yonder is the 'White Woman,' Iztaccihuatl, the wife of Popocatepetl. There are no men brave enough to venture up the slopes of either for fear of the wrath of the gods."

"Indians may fear them," cried one of the captains, Diego Ordaz, "but a Spaniard knows no such fear. Will you give me and my men permission, Señor, to make closer acquaintance with yon smoking mountain?"

"Gladly, Ordaz," answered Cortes. "It pleases me ever to

give proof to our allies of what stuff Spaniards are made. Go, and we will await you here."

Fernando begged to be one of the party, but Cortes refused. He knew that the expedition would test severely the strength of grown men. While the army rested in its temporary camp, Ordaz, nine soldiers and a few Tlascalans cut their way through the heavy undergrowth of the forest at the foot of the slope. Loud rumblings from the interior of the mountain were soon heard and proved too much for the bravery of the Indians, who returned to camp. The Spaniards pushed on laboriously over lava beds to where the snow line began. With great difficulty they climbed step by step over icy fields till they almost reached the summit. Then wide streams of molten lava and choking fumes checked them, and much to their disappointment, they were forced to descend just a little before the highest point.

"What token is it you bring back?" cried out Cortes as the little party limped wearily but proudly back to camp.

"An icicle, Captain," replied Ordaz, "which I plucked from the path of the burning torrent."

Later, when Cortes's report of his expedition had come into the hands of the Emperor, Charles V. gave unto Diego de Ordaz the right for himself and for his family to bear a burning mountain as his coat of arms.

Each day the march of the army was more arduous, and many of the troops suffered severely from the intense cold and the rarified air of the altitude.

"Old Montezuma must dwell in heaven itself, if a heathen may," growled Bernal Diaz, "and we shall never climb up there in this life."

But Cortes, whose impatience to get to the end of his journey, scarcely allowed him to sleep, urged the men on to further efforts.

On the following day the road became a narrow defile enclosed by high stone walls which left no outlet for the sight but the sky.

"So is sorrow," said Father Olmedo to Cortes, "which turns our eyes from earthly distractions towards heaven."

But Cortes paid little heed to the words of the priest. He had caught sight of Fernando running towards him, his eyes glowing.

"Master!" he cried out, "hasten and see the sight beyond. There lies Montezuma's kingdom. I went ahead while all of you were resting, and when I turned that corner of the road I beheld the wonder of it all."

Cortes ordered the march to be resumed at once, and in a quarter of an hour they had passed through the defile and stood on the side of the cliffs where they could see below them spread out all the Valley of Tenochtitlan. It was like a giant's flower garden, with dark patches of forests and gayly colored fields and farm lands. The two great lakes glistened in the sunlight which was reflected back from the stones of palaces and temples. And around the entire valley rose the ring of snow-tipped mountains.

All stood for a moment silently gazing; then the soldiers began to murmur. The sight of all the wealth and signs of ordered civilization before them impressed them with the power of Montezuma and the people he reigned over. They cried out that it was foolhardy to think of conquering this land with their

handful of troops. Again Cortes appealed to them, begging them not to turn their backs on the glory and the riches that awaited them; and at last he and his captains succeeded in persuading them to go on.

They descended into the valley and passed through numerous villages, in some of which the inhabitants welcomed them with gifts of flowers, and in others the folk stared at them in silence.

Another embassy from Montezuma was seen approaching. They bore gifts of gold and furs and feather robes, and their spokesman repeated the message of their Emperor, that he would bestow great quantities of gold upon Cortes and his men if they would come no farther.

While they were speaking Fernando had caught sight of a boy of about his own age among the envoys. The boy—Ahuitzotl—had eyes for Fernando only. They gazed fixedly at each other, apprising as boys have always done, the strength and resistance of the other. One of the Caciques held out a small shield ornamented with feathers to Ahuitzotl and gave him some command. Ahuitzotl looked as if he disliked obeying, nevertheless he took the shield and walked slowly towards Fernando.

" 'Tis a gift to you, white boy," he said.

"My thanks to him who sent it," answered Fernando.

"Do you speak our tongue?" asked the Aztec in astonishment.

"Somewhat," replied Fernando.

He examined the shield eagerly. The Aztec showed him how it should be held, and Fernando in return showed him his dagger which he wore in his belt, on which he had noticed

Ahuitzotl's eyes fastened. His hands happened to touch those of the Indian as he pulled the Toledo knife from its leathern sheath, and he experienced a sudden feeling that their touch was familiar to him, though he hunted through his memory in vain for a clue. Then all at once he seemed to see once again a figure struggling in a dim light and he felt again the iron grip of fingers about his throat.

"It was you then?" he exclaimed. But the Aztec's features gave no sign of understanding. Still Fernando was now certain that it had indeed been this boy who had so nearly succeeded in stealing Cortes's sword and who had got the better of himself in the struggle. He measured his opponent with his eye and wondered whether if he had not been taken by surprise he might not have held his own.

"What is your name?" he asked, looking fixedly at him. "I would see more of thee some day."

"Ahuitzotl," replied the Aztec, who had no doubt for what purpose the Spanish boy wished to meet him again. "And how do they call you?" he asked in turn.

"Fer-nan-do, Fer-nan-do," repeated the other slowly, to let the unaccustomed sound sink into his ear and brain.

Xicotencatl, the Tlascalan, had been standing some distance away, observing the two boys. Now he came towards them and put an end to the meeting, which he knew would not have progressed so peacefully had they been free of witnesses.

"Are you from the court of Montezuma?" he asked Ahuitzotl.

"I am the chief page of our great Emperor," replied the boy, drawing himself up proudly.

"Then you must know Prince Guatemozin?" questioned the Cacique again.

"He is my master in the training of a warrior," and Ahuitzotl as he answered looked almost prouder of this honour than of his close relation to his sovereign.

"Will you bear to him this message? Say to him that the Tlascalan whom he knows waits eagerly to match once more with him the strength of his arm, and that the day is not far distant when he will meet him in a place fitter for a combat that the women's quarters. Will you tell him this?"

"Yea, I will bear your message, Tlascalan," agreed Ahuitzotl; "but it will behoove thee to have a strong arm indeed before you can hope to bear his down." He did not recognize in the Tlascalan chieftain the fugitive he had pursued a few days before.

Then he walked off slowly and rejoined the envoys who were departing without the concession from Cortes they had hoped to bear to Montezuma. The Spanish leader had given them honied words for honied words of theirs, and he had told them to say to their Emperor that he could not forego the pleasure of seeing for himself the wonders of his city.

When Ahuitzotl entered the royal chamber he found Montezuma much disturbed. The knowledge that the Spaniards were now almost at his gate, and that neither bribes nor plots had sufficed to halt them, made him pace the floor with anxiety. Some parrots chained to golden perches turned their brilliant heads to watch him, as if amazed at his unusual restlessness.

"If I could but know what is in their hearts, wherefore they

come here and what they will of me!" exclaimed Montezuma, speaking aloud.

There was no one else but Ahuitzotl in the chamber. He alone was the witness of these rare moments when the dread sovereign showed signs of common human weakness.

"Sire, may I speak?" he asked.

"Speak!" commanded Montezuma, though he looked annoyed at the interruption to his thoughts.

"I believe, Lord," said the page, "that while Malinche tarries on the way, one of the Teules could be brought before you whom you might question fully, and learn what is in their hearts."

"Even were that impossible thing possible, boy," said the Emperor, his tone showing how foolish Ahuitzotl's suggestion seemed to him, "how could one speak to a Teule in his strange tongue?"

Then Ahuitzotl knelt at Montezuma's feet, and in low words, though there were none to overhear, told of the plan he had rapidly thought out. Gradually Montezuma's indifference changed to interest. Calling a slave, he sent him to summon Cacama to his presence. While they were waiting he asked Ahuitzotl many questions, and discovered how closely his page had studied the ways of the white men during the days he had spied on their camp. He took from his arm a bracelet of tortoise shell and gold and slipped it on Ahuitzotl's wrist.

"Let this remind you," he said, "that Montezuma will reward you for your services to him."

Then Cacama was announced.

"Your son has conceived a strange plan, Cacique," he said. "Listen, that you may help in bringing to pass what he dreams of."

CHAPTER XV

Montezuma Asks Questions

DURING the months since he had left Cuba Fernando had grown from a child into a youth not far from manhood. His body had become like tempered steel; his wits had sharpened and his bravery had already been remarked among men none of whom were cowards. Yet, unlike Ahuitzotl, there was one thing he had to learn before he could have the right to call himself a warrior—absolute obedience. He did not intend to disobey, but some sudden keen impulse would lead him to disregard the ordinances of the camp. And Cortes, who knew so well how to hold his men in strict discipline, would content himself with imposing a scolding or some slight punishment upon his page in consideration of his youth.

Since the day of his escape from the teocalli, Fernando had given heed to the warning not to wander away, in camp or on the march. But at sunset of the day when he had recognized Ahuitzotl he climbed a small hillock to gain a nearer view of the city which lay only a few miles beyond. The soldiers had bivouacked just at the foot of the hill, so that he was scarcely out of bounds; and when tired of gazing and of eating the

fruit which grew all about him, he had no fear of sitting down to rest where he was. The darkness was falling, and in another minute he said to himself he would descend to the fires the soldiers were lighting for warmth and for preparing their evening meal.

It had been a long day for Fernando, so his head nodded and drooped with weariness. One leg stretched out to a comfortable position and then the other, and soon the boy lay fast asleep flat on the ground.

A ray of moonlight striking his face awoke him. He sat up and tried to recall where he was. He knew, from the height of the moon dimmed by heavy clouds, that he must have slept for hours. The fires in the camp below had gone out and the world was deathly still. His heart beat quickly from his sudden awakening and the loneliness of his surroundings. He glanced apprehensively about him to reassure himself that there was nothing to be afraid of. But what were those tall white figures in front, too dimly seen in the semi-darkness for him to be sure? He seemed to see plumes waving, though they did not advance. Was the whiteness that of quilted armour? His hand clasped his dagger. He was frightened, yet it was not the same kind of fear which he had experienced on the sacrificial stone. Now if death were in front of him he knew he could die fighting. Then he thought of Cortes and his comrades below. Was this another night attack of which he could warn them? He must know. So with a prayer in his heart he stepped bravely forward.

A moonbeam lighted up for a second the row of white objects, and he almost laughed with relief—they were the tall

white stalks massed thickly together of the yucca plant, known later as "Spanish Bayonets."

He was about to run down the hill when he heard his name spoken softly, and he saw ahead of him the figure of a man. The voice was so low that he could scarcely have recognized its owner, but even in the obscurity he could see that the features were those of Cortes. There was no gleam of armour; he was wrapped in a long Aztec cloak of wool such as he sometimes threw about him to protect him from the sharp night air.

"Fernando," called the low voice, and the figure laid his fingers to his lips to counsel silence. "Fernando" came the call again.

Fernando started forward, in the direction away from the camp. He bent his head in shamefacedness at the thought that once more he must be chided for disobeying orders and that his absence had forced his master to break his rest to come himself in search of him. He started to speak, but again there was the signal for silence. Walk as rapidly as he would, he could not keep up with the long stride ahead.

Then the idea came to him that it was not merely to hunt out his page that Cortes was there. His silence and the direction they were taking were proof that he had some important matter on hand.

Fernando's heart grew lighter and he lifted his head again: he was to be allowed to assist in whatever it might be; he had been chosen instead of Alvarado or Sandoval or other captains, he thought proudly. He felt so grateful for this proof of confidence that he swore to himself never again would he disobey in the slightest degree any command of Cortes.

He followed on after the beckoning silent figure, down the other side of the hillock and on to the plain below, by a path that bordered fields of tall maize. Now surely, he said to himself, that they were out of earshot of the camp, his master would let him catch up with him and would explain. He quickened his steps, but still could not shorten the distance between them.

Suddenly there came to him a doubt which made him shiver, but the figure turned to him the well known features and again called "Fernando." How could he fear when he was with Cortes? Still the sinister quiet of the wide plain enveloped him like a stifling vapor—he must call out and put an end to it.

"Master!" he cried, "wait for me a moment. I am afraid."

Now the figure halted, and when Fernando had caught up with him, he threw aside the mantle and disclosed the garb of an Aztec Cacique, and the terrified boy, looking up into the whitened face, saw that it belonged to Cacama, the chief at whose strange resemblance to Cortes all the Spaniards had marvelled.

Now he knew that his fright had been justified. At a low call from the Cacique two slaves crawled out from the stalks of the maize, and bound Fernando's arms, legs and mouth firmly but gently, with soft scarfs that did not hurt him. One lifted him to his back and started off on a quick trot, the other running by his side. Every now and then they shifted the burden to the other's shoulders, so as to prevent either from growing weary and having to decrease his speed, which was little less than that of a trotting horse. They covered the ground so

rapidly that soon they had arrived at the lake on the borders of which lay the great city of Tenochtitlan. Now they bound another scarf over the boy's eyes, and shortly after he felt himself laid gently in a boat and knew that it was being rapidly rowed across the lake. Once more he was lifted to the slave's back, and soon the dulled footsteps, the heavy perfumed air, told him that he was within the walls of some large building. Was it another temple, he wondered? Were the gods this time destined to enjoy the sacrifice which had escaped them before?

He was set down on the ground, his feet sinking into a soft mat; the scarfs were undone and taken away, and he saw that he was in a large hall with heavily carved cedar beams and walls, hung with the richest feather hangings as gorgeous as a flock of parrots. In front of him, on a raised seat inlaid with gold, sat a man with a crown on his head, and wearing garments studded with turquoises. He knew without a doubt that this was Montezuma. Standing about him were a few courtiers only, the Emperor's chosen councilors. Fernando's eyes blazed with anger when he caught sight of Ahuitzotl fanning Montezuma with a turkey-feather fan. There was a look in the Aztec boy's face which said as plainly as words that it was he who was responsible for bringing him hither. Fernando bowed low to the Emperor and waited what was to come.

"Fear not, stranger," began Montezuma after a moment's eager scrutiny of the strange aspect of the first European he had ever beheld. "No harm shall be done you. We have brought you hither because we understand that you speak our tongue and because there are certain questions we would ask

of you concerning Malinche. We trust that you have not suffered any pain on thy way to our palace."

Montezuma was the first monarch Fernando had ever beheld, so that he had no standard by which to measure him. Nevertheless, he doubted whether Charles the Fifth, King of Spain, Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, Lord of all New Spain of the Ocean Sea, as Cortes called Mexico, was a more awe-inspiring figure than this Indian king. He bowed low again as he replied.

"I have suffered no harm, Sire."

Montezuma showed his pleasure at discovering that he could comprehend the stranger's words. It was almost as if he had heard human speech in the mouth of a beast.

"My page here," and he motioned to Ahuitzotl, "has told me the truth about you then. Doubtless what he has related to me of Malinche and his warriors is true also. But sharp as are Ahuitzotl's eyes and ears, he could not see nor hear what is planned and said in the white men's hearts. For this reason I sent for you that I might learn the truth."

The gentleness of Montezuma's words and voice told Fernando that his life was in no danger. Therefore he was able to give full attention to the strangeness of the present scene. So it was as he had thought, that the Aztec boy had been sent to spy upon the camp!

Montezuma continued:

"Tell me, are you men or gods?"

Fernando realized that, even if the Emperor might still be in doubt, too many in the land were already convinced of the

human nature of his countrymen for Montezuma to be long deceived.

"We are only men, Sire," he answered.

"And what is it then that Malinche seeks in my kingdom?" asked the Aztec. "Why has he travelled so many leagues and traversed so many mountains to journey to Tenochtitlan?"

Fernando's brain worked quickly. If he told the truth how could it harm the Spaniards, even though the royal anger should be vented upon himself for uttering it? The sooner Montezuma realized that nothing could stop Cortes's advance the better it would be for all. So he spoke slowly and clearly:

"He comes to greet you, oh King, to admire the wonders of your capital city and to . . . claim your allegiance to our Emperor beyond the seas, the greatest monarch on earth."

Montezuma clenched his hands, and several of his councilors started forwards, as if to slay the bold speaker who dared suggest to their sovereign that there was in all the world a power above his authority. But Montezuma waved them back and gave an order to Ahuitzotl, who left the hall.

"I will send tribute to your Emperor," he said in a low voice that spoke to those familiar with him of the utmost dejection, "and there is no need for Malinche to come hither for it. Behold"—and he pointed to the slaves who, preceded by Ahuitzotl, came in bearing baskets on their heads—"this treasure which I will send back by you as one hundredth part of the tribute. Will not this satisfy Malinche?"

The slaves set down the baskets. All the gold and jewels which Fernando had seen since leaving Cuba were as nothing

compared to this now before him. Yet he did not hesitate to answer:

"Malinche has sworn that he would greet you in Tenochtitlan, oh, King; and sooner could you stop the sun from rising than bid him halt."

His manner was deferential but his words carried conviction to Montezuma. For days and months he had been uncertain how to deal with these strangers who had appeared from the unknown. He had tried to intimidate, to bribe, to plot against them, his heart always misgiving him that whatever method he adopted at the moment was wrong. Now he had gained the certainty he sought—there was to be no stopping them—and his heart was filled with foreboding and great sadness.

The councilors now voiced their opinions, many of them, Montezuma's own brother and others, demanding that the entire Aztec army set out at once to slaughter the invaders before they advanced another league. But Montezuma shook his head and said in a sorrowful voice:

"Of what avail is resistance when the gods have declared against us? Yet I mourn most for the old and infirm, the women and children, too feeble to fight or to fly. For myself and the brave men around me, we must bare our breasts to the storm and meet it as we may."

Then he commanded that another and last embassy be sent to the Spaniards at once, this time not to try to turn them back, but to welcome them to Tenochtitlan in his name. Perhaps the Teules would be affected by kindness and could be persuaded to depart before long for the land whence they had come. Then Montezuma walked slowly from the hall.

Fernando knew that the Emperor had completely forgotten his presence; not so the Caciques who remained, who cast no friendly glances at him.

"Let us slay him," cried Cacama who had entered the apartment towards the end of the scene, "that he may not tell Malinche how he has witnessed the weakness of Montezuma."

Others were of like mind except Guatemozin, who said that his death would rouse the anger of Cortes against them.

"Am I permitted to speak in the council of my elders?" asked Ahuitzotl, and when Guatemozin had waved his hand in permission, he began:

"Malinche will never know what has befallen his page; he will believe that he wandered from the camp at night and was slain by wild beasts. Let us send back his garments rubbed in blood and leave them on the road near the camp. But let us keep the boy alive, since it may be that some time we shall have need of him again. And if not, then the gods have always hunger for a sacrifice."

The Caciques gave their assent. Ahuitzotl spoke with wisdom beyond his years, they declared, and since it was his plan, they gave the boy to him to guard until he should be required.

Fernando realized that there was no chance of escape and no wisdom in a useless struggle in a palace where slaves and guards were so numerous. Therefore he submitted to changing his clothes for the Aztec robe and mantle brought him and followed his warder as stoically as an Indian. Through many halls of the palace they went, and it was not until they were about to enter some court or garden that Ahuitzotl spoke.

"I must bind your eyes, Teule," he said, and Fernando let

him do it. Then the Aztec put his hand on his prisoner's arm and led him out of doors. He guided him carefully enough, with no unnecessary roughness. After perhaps a quarter of an hour's walk they entered another house. His captor removed the bandage, and Fernando saw that he was in the inner court of what seemed to be a private house. A small fountain played in the centre of a stone basin and flowering bushes surrounded it. Overhead was the sky and behind him dark, windowless rooms. Ahuitzotl gave a peculiar call, and a slave came forward with food and water which he laid on the rim of the fountain. Then Ahuitzotl and he went out into the street and left Fernando a prisoner once more.

. . . . . .

When Cortes first missed Fernando he was exceedingly angry that his page should have again disobeyed him and wandered off. He was eager to set out on the day's march and begrudged the delay which the search would cause. He sent soldiers in every direction, and he was prepared to punish his page as soon as he returned as he had never punished him before. Then one of the soldiers rushed in with bits of Fernando's garments all bloody, and told how he had seen footprints of some wild beast on the spot where he found them. Cortes was horrified, and grieved as for a son, and there were few in all the army who did not regret the loss of the promising young warrior. Xicotencatl, when he had visited the spot where Fernando's supposed death occurred, examined the footprints carefully.

"In truth they are the track of an ocelot," he said to himself,

"But one that walks not in freedom. Perchance he was brought here in a cage."

However, he spoke nothing of his suspicions. The next few days were so full that Cortes had little time for outward grief. They came first to one town and then another in the vicinity of Tenochtitlan and were amazed at the signs of the Aztec civilization. The Caciques welcomed them to palaces prepared for their use, and everywhere they heard of the power and magnificence of Montezuma.

The final embassy arrived with the King of Tezcuco, Montezuma's nephew, to greet the Spaniards in his great uncle's name. The magnificence of his costume was beyond anything the Spaniards had yet beheld in Mexico.

In spite of all the wonder of the cities of Amaquemecan, Ajotzinco and Cuitlahuac, which at another time would have claimed all Cortes's attention, he could not tarry in them long, so eager was he to reach the end of the most adventurous journey which perhaps man ever undertook. Finally he arrived at the last stopping place before Tenochtitlan, the royal town of Iztapalapan, governed by a brother of Montezuma. Cortes estimated that the city must contain about fifteen thousand houses, fair and large dwellings, but the palace dwarfed them all. Here the Emperor's brother and numerous Caciques welcomed the Spaniards in a great tapestried hall which excited the admiration of the conquerors. A banquet was served them of strange and rare dishes. Then they were shown into the gardens, the finest in all Anahuac next to the royal gardens of Chapultepec, the Cacique declared. There were squares of every kind of flowers and an aviary containing thousands of

bright plumaged birds. They saw also a huge stone reservoir surrounded by a stone promenade wide enough for four persons to stroll along abreast. This was filled with many kinds of fish and was fed by canals from the lake upon which Iztapalapan was built.

And Cortes, standing before this reservoir, could see in the distance the sunset flaming upon his goal—the City of Montezuma.

CHAPTER XVI

The Guests of Montezuma

IT was early in the morning of the eighth of November that Cortes, as eager as a hunting dog, made ready for his entry into Tenochtitlan. He was in the saddle half an hour before he had commanded the advance, and to while away the time of waiting he polished nervously the brass ornaments of the bridle with the back of his leather glove.

"My steed and I miss Fernando," he explained almost shamefacedly to Gonsalvo de Sandoval, who was soon mounted beside him; "and it will not do for any of us to fail to shine his brightest this day of days."

Now he shouted out the word to advance, and his eye sparkled as he watched his little troop of cavalry pass by, followed by the infantry and the artillery. The rear was closed by the Tlascalan allies. Then, having reviewed his army, he spurred to his place in the van. The soldiers marvelled as they marched at the semi-aquatic life of the towns just outside of the capital. Most of the houses were built on piles, and the boats fastened to them seemed only like additional floating rooms. Canoes of all sizes pressed close to the long causeway over which the Spaniards were marching, and floating islands

of greenery, covered with growing flowers and vegetables—the famous *chinampas,* were slowly propelled across the lake, thus changing its contours every moment.

"This is a wonderful bit of masonry," exclaimed Cortes, as the horsemen three abreast trotted across the firm causeway; "but 'tis all marvel here. I can scarce believe that you are Alvarado, and that this is Gonsalvo on my left, and that I am Hernando Cortes, all marching here in the flesh. Is it indeed real, Alvarado?"

"Yonder comes a new marvel," answered his lieutenant smiling. "See the dragon-fly-like nobles who advance to meet us. And, if I am not wrong in judging by the action of the crowd, they are the advance guard of Montezuma himself."

The Spaniards halted and Cortes commanded all his officers to mass in a line behind him. The Caciques, a-glitter with jewels, rings in their ears, their underlips and even their noses, gazed in wonder at the bright mail and tarnished jerkins of the Teules, and then made their salutations. After this ceremony was over, they turned back to the city, the Spaniards following them to the spot where they had been told Montezuma would welcome them. When they reached it Cortes gave the word to halt, and sat motionless like a bronze equestrian statue in some wide square of a Spanish city. Yet he did not miss one detail of the picture before him: the palanquin borne on the shoulders of nobles and its canopy of featherwork and silver carried by other Caciques, all of whom were barefoot; the slaves who spread before it a cotton carpet for the imperial feet, nor the long lines of brilliantly dressed folk who bent down to the ground as their monarch passed them.

He watched the great Emperor of the western world step from the palanquin and, accompanied on either side by the Kings of Tezcuco and Iztapalapan, advance towards him. He noted the tall lithe figure of the Aztec, the black hair which hung down his back, the keenly cut features, the air of youth; but he noted also a half puzzled expression in the dark eyes, a lack of determination in the mouth, which signs he read as a prophecy.

The Spaniards gazed with unconcealed admiration at Montezuma's attire, at the square robe of finest cotton, at the iridescent mantle of rarest feathers that hung from his shoulders and at the golden soles of his sandals. From his head floated the regal plumes of green.

Cortes had dismounted and advanced towards the Aztec monarch. After the formal salutations Montezuma spoke words of welcome. Marina, who stood by Cortes's side during the interview, gave his thanks for all the gifts sent him at various times. He then flung about Montezuma's neck a necklace of colored crystals, begging him to accept it as a small token of his gratitude.

"Look ye!" cried Alvarado to his comrades, "the Captain leans forward to embrace the Emperor. See how the Aztec holds back proudly and how horrified his courtiers look. He is a fine figure of a king, no matter what his color, and bears himself like one."

The monarch then stepped back into his palanquin and was borne away. Cortes gave the word to mount, and with his great flag unfurled and to the sound of music, the Spaniards entered Tenochtitlan.

"If we thought Cempoalla and Tlascala and Cholula large towns," exclaimed de Olid as they rode along the wide southern street, down which they had a long vista of the city, "we knew as little as a man might know of Spain who had never seen Seville."

"Are those flower gardens?" questioned Sandoval, pointing to some of the *azoteas,* or roof terraces, where the inhabitants of Tenochtitlan spent so much of their life.

"They grow flowers now," commented Cortes curtly, "but we may see them sprout rocks some day."

The houses were all one-storied, those of the nobles were built of red stone and those of the poorer folk of plaster covered with white cement. But to counteract the low line of the dwellings, the teocallis lifted their peaks all over the city. There were wide market spaces and gardens, and surrounding all the beauty of the city was the fair valley with its lakes, and in the distance the high white peaks of the sentinel mountains.

"Granada itself is not more beautiful," cried Alvarado enthusiastically.

"See yon temple," cried Father Olmeda. "'Tis the shrine of their terrible War God, and horrible are the scenes which are enacted there. It is a vile spot that spoils all this beauty." Then as he walked he repeated to himself. "How long, oh Lord, how long?"

The Caciques appointed by Montezuma conducted Cortes to the palace set apart for him and his men, close to the Great Teocalli.

"It is firmly constructed," commented Cortes, examining it

with a quick eye as he leapt from his horse. To his astonishment, he saw that Montezuma was already there to welcome them, and this proof of royal courtesy brought all his own to the surface. It was with a genuine smile that he hurried towards him.

From a basket of flowers held by a slave Montezuma took a chain of gold in which was set the shell of a kind of crawfish that was valued by the Aztecs for its rarity as much as jewels. From it hung a number of little gold crawfish delicately fashioned. He hung this around Cortes's neck (who suddenly felt ashamed of the chain he had given Montezuma) and said:

"This palace belongs to you, Malinche, and to your brethren. Rest after your great fatigues, for you have much need to do so, and in a little while I will visit you again."

When he had left Cortes set about examining the palace thoroughly. It had been built by Axayacatl, Montezuma's father, and covered much ground, so that in its various rooms and courts there was space enough for the entire army. Best of all though, he thought, was the fact that it was well suited for defence. Before he allowed any one to take the much needed rest which Montezuma had counselled, he appointed each man to a certain post, stationed the guns, and stabled and fed the horses. Then he breathed a sigh of relief and turning to Sandoval, said:

"We are *here,* Gonsalvo, here, housed, welcomed! After how many leagues, after how many battles, wounds, fatigues and despair! Whatever may follow, this at least may never be taken from us. We have done what no men ever did before."

Then he ate and slept until he was roused by the word that Montezuma was approaching for his promised visit.

The Aztec was greatly struck with the changed appearance of the palace during the few hours since he left it. Marina was kept busy answering questions about the white men's country, their sovereign and their religion. Then presents were brought forward: cotton sufficient to make new garments for every man in the army, and many gold chains and ornaments.

That night Cortes ordered the guns to be fired in celebration of their safe arrival and doubtless also that he might astonish the Aztecs. They were indeed greatly impressed and terrified at the sound of the salvos and the sight of the flashes from the mouths of the cannon. Not one inhabitant in all Tenochtitlan who did not run out from his house to learn what had happened.

And Fernando, alone in the courtyard of his prison, sprang to his feet in excitement. His countrymen were near, and if he could only escape from the house he would manage somehow to get to them. But though he examined the walls again for the hundredth time he could find no possible exit. There was no way to reach the roof either from within or without. He had spent all his weary hours in trying to find one. The only opening was by the door which was fastened on the outside, and when the slave brought him his food each night Fernando could see by the light of a torch that a soldier waited for him at the threshold.

Early the next morning Cortes, having announced his visit to Montezuma, with Alvarado, Sandoval, Ordaz, and accompanied by Marina, Bernal Diaz and four other soldiers, set out

THEY SAW MONTEZUMA SEATED

for the palace. The nobles whom the Emperor had sent to wait upon them led them slowly through the streets.

"I would wager my new gold chain," declared Diaz to a comrade, "that our Spanish King has not so large a palace in which to house his court. It is naught to speak of for height, but it covers enough ground to make up for it."

They passed in through the marble gate, over which was carved an Eagle bearing an Ocelot in its claws—the arms of Montezuma, they were told. The abundance of the red hue of the stone walls was tiring to the eyes, but they left it soon behind to enter the cool green court where a fountain was playing, its spray falling upon the dark leaves of many varieties of palms.

"Baths, says Marina!" exclaimed Diaz. "She declares that the palace is filled with them, that the water flows down into the city in great abundance from the hill we saw. And the King, she says, bathes each day like a Moor, and gives away the clothes he wears before stepping into the basin, as he will not wear the same garments twice. It must save his servitors much outlay!"

Their guides, the Caciques, led them from one hall to another, all with low ceilings and carpeted with mats and hung with skins or painted cotton hangings. They showed the Spaniards the armoury, and Sandoval could scarcely be persuaded to leave the various weapons and uniforms which he examined with the eye of an expert. Scarcely less fascinated was Alvarado with the menagerie, where was kept every kind of wild animal to be found in Mexico, and the wonderful aviary and gardens charmed them all. When they learned that three

hundred men had charge of the birds alone they could measure in a way the vastness of Montezuma's luxury.

But after all it was Montezuma himself whom they had come to see, who was to them not only the man but the symbol of all his kingdom and this strange civilization which almost overawed them.

"Forget not that he is only a pagan," said Cortes, divining their feelings, "all of whose magnificence and wealth can not make him the equal of the poorest Christian soldier."

As they reached the audience hall the Spaniards looked on with interest while the Caciques who conducted them laid aside their sandals and put robes of coarse *nequen* over their bright costumes.

"What does this signify, Marina?" asked Cortes.

"No man save princes of the blood may enter the presence of the Emperor except barefoot and clad thus humbly," replied the girl, who herself was far from at ease at the thought that she was to appear before her sovereign.

They saw Montezuma seated at the end of the audience hall, surrounded by some of his nobles. Marina noted that the page who stood at his side was the same who had accompanied the envoys. After the salutations were made Cortes could no longer restrain the words that had been waiting so long to pass his lips.

"King Montezuma," he said through Marina's interpretation, "we have come from afar that we might open to thy soul the truth of God's revelation to man. The gods you and your people worship are demons whose only desire is to harm mankind; but since you were ignorant of our blessed Christian

faith, how should you have known what other way to turn? Therefore we rejoice greatly that in return for all the gifts you have showered upon us, we can bestow upon you the greatest of all gifts—the knowledge of the life and death of our glorious Saviour and the teachings of Holy Church."

Montezuma and his nobles listened while Marina sought for words by which to make clear to them the doctrines of Christian theologians. The Aztecs wondered what the white men might mean when they crossed themselves.

Cortes was exceedingly eloquent. The moment had come for which he had struggled and waited; for his zeal for the faith, as in many of the early explorers, was as genuine as love of adventure or greed of gold. He likened himself to one of the prophets in the Old Testament to whom Jehovah had given a message for a heathen king; and even his comrades who shared his belief were astonished at his fervor and at the ease with which he put into words the mysteries of their religion. He related the story of Adam and Eve, their Fall, the necessity of Atonement, and he dwelt upon the eternal fires of Hell, from which he now longed to snatch the souls of all the people in Anahuac. Therefore he besought the Emperor to save his subjects by leading them to the Cross.

"I know that your god must be a good god," answered Montezuma when Cortes had finished. "Yet our gods too are good and not the demons you have thought them. Perchance you have heard of the Great Being, the God of the Winds, Quetzalcoatl, who led my fathers into this land from the northward many cycles ago, and when he left us promised to return some day. We doubt not that you and your people, Malinche,

were sent by him. At first we feared you because of the lightnings with which you did destroy those who went against you, but now we see you we know that you are good and that your white faces proclaim you of the race of Quetzalcoatl. You too have been told perhaps that I am a god and dwell in palaces of gold and silver. But you see it is false. My houses, though large, are of stone and wood like those of others; and as to my body you see that it is flesh and blood like yours. It is true, I have a great empire, inherited from my ancestors: lands and gold and silver. But your sovereign beyond the waters is, I know, the rightful lord of all."

Some of the Aztec nobles, whose brows knit with displeasure as Montezuma was speaking, now could scarcely avoid showing their feelings more openly. Only the great awe which their sovereign's presence imposed upon them kept them silent.

Montezuma continued:

"I rule in his name. You, Malinche, are his ambassador; you and your brethren shall share these things with me. Rest now from your labors. You are here in your own dwelling and everything shall be provided for your subsistence. I will see that your wishes shall be obeyed in the same way as my own."

Cortes, the soldier, the ambassador, could ask for no more than this; Cortes, the preacher, was disappointed that his words had not caused the Aztec's immediate conversion. However, he recalled how Father Olmedo had recommended patience.

Again Montezuma bestowed gifts upon his guests as they were departing. His page Ahuitzotl accompanied the slaves

who distributed them. Cortes noted the strong, lithe figure of the youth and bade Marina ask his name.

"Tell him," said the Spaniard, "that I had once a page of his age, but the wild beasts of the valley robbed me of him."

Ahuitzotl bowed in recognition of the great Captain's notice without answering, as he went on distributing the cloths and trinkets.

Bernal Diaz, like the other private soldiers, received two heavy collars of gold.

"He is a generous giver," he remarked to one of his companions. "Would you believe it, Pedro, but I felt a mite sorry for him while he was talking to the Captain. I saw the tears come into his eyes when he said that he ruled now only for Emperor Charles. No man gives up his right willingly."

While Cortes and his officers had been at the audience Xicotencatl, accompanied by a few of his men, had been strolling through the city. It pleased him to walk boldly through the very streets where a few months before his life had been in danger as he ran through them, a fugitive. Everywhere he went the inhabitants scowled at the sight of their hated Tlascalan enemies. They were willing to welcome the white strangers now that their king and the priests bade them, but it was another matter to look calmly upon those cursed mountain folk in their midst. On several occasions a brawl was averted with difficulty. Xicotencatl did not go within the gates of the Great Teocalli where he had nearly been sacrificed on the altar. He doubted whether any authority could prevent the priests from falling upon him and his men. Yet he kept in its vicinity, which was also that of Montezuma's palace.

He was eager for a sight of Prince Guatemozin, and thought it likely that he might pass out the palace gate after the audience was over.

And he was not disappointed. When the Spaniards had departed Xicotencatl beheld a group of young nobles leave the palace on the way to their own houses, and among them he had no trouble in recognizing Guatemozin. He stood on the opposite side of the street, against a wall from which trailing blossoms were drooping, and folding his arms, he bent his gaze upon the Prince. Guatemozin could not fail to observe the striking figure, whose garb proclaimed him as a Tlascalan warrior. Then he recalled the features. He called a page.

"Bear my message to Chief Xicotencatl," he commanded. "Tell him that Guatemozin is no less eager to redeem his word than is Xicotencatl. Yet while the Tlascalans are allies of Malinche, our guest, Montezuma's nephew may not fight him. Let him wait as patiently as he may, for the day will yet come when we shall try our strength against each other."

Xicotencatl listened to the boy's words and with a formal gesture of acknowledgment to the Prince, turned and strode back to his quarters.

CHAPTER XVII

Montezuma's Humiliation

ON the third day Fernando's loneliness was broken by the coming of Ahuitzotl with food. The two boys stared at each other like two dogs, ready to spring. Yet a chivalrous feeling that he must not take advantage of his captive kept the Aztec from coming to blows, and Fernando refrained because he knew that even if he proved the stronger and injured Ahuitzotl, the latter would probably leave him to starve, if not worse. So they merely glared at each other.

On the following day Ahuitzotl said curtly when he had placed the basket of fruit and bread on a mat:

"Of what material is your knife made? We have naught like it in our land."

"Of steel," answered Fernando, showing it, "fashioned by the best workmen of Toledo."

The Aztec fingered it curiously and then pulling out from his girdle a blade of black obsidian, compared the edges of the two.

"Yours is the sharper," he confessed; "will you feel mine?"

Fernando handled both weapons and was astonished to discover how sharp the stone instrument was.

This common interest had broken the ice, and Ahuitzotl asked many questions about the life of a Spanish soldier.

"I observed them on the march into Tlascala," he acknowledged at last, "but I was not able to witness all the methods by which your warriors are trained."

"I knew that it was you who sought to wrest my master's sword from me," cried Fernando, clenching his fist.

"Yes, it was I," boasted the Aztec, "and if you had been alone I should have carried it off."

No matter what the consequences might be, Fernando could not listen to this taunt. He flung himself upon Ahuitzotl, and the two rolled over and over, pummelling each other. So evenly matched were they that neither could keep an advantage he gained, and it seemed as if they might go on forever rolling, first one and then the other uppermost, like two tumble-bugs. But as Fernando was on top, a drum-beat from Montezuma's palace came to their ears. It was the signal that Montezuma was going in state to the teocalli, and his page dared not fail to be in attendance. Ahuitzotl struggled to his feet and Fernando made no resistance. They had tested each other's strength now and there was no bitterness of defeat for either.

Before he returned the next day Ahuitzotl had done much pondering about his captive. When he took Fernando in charge he had had no very clear idea of what he meant to do with him, beyond the thought that it would not be wise for him to be free and able to inform Malinche of the weakness he had witnessed in Montezuma, and that the time would be sure to come when the Spanish boy would prove a valuable hostage.

Finally an idea had come to him. He would have liked to carry out his plan all alone, but it was necessary to discuss it with his father.

When Ahuitzotl appeared in the courtyard the two boys greeted each other, if not cordially, at least with a certain amount of mutual respect. Ahuitzotl began at once to speak, telling of all that had taken place since Fernando's imprisonment, of the entrance of the Teules and their instalment in the palace. Then he said:

"You are my captive, Fernando, and in my power, is it not so?"

"You speak the truth," answered the Spaniard, too proud to beg for his freedom.

"I will not slay you," continued his captor, "yet I have the right to require certain things of you. Is it so with your people that a warrior who is the captive of another warrior owes him allegiance?"

"Only within the bounds of knightly custom," answered Fernando.

"Then you will understand that I may command this strange thing of you," said Ahuitzotl. "Listen to my desire. I am eager to know how your soldiers are drilled so that I, who shall some day be a leader of many warriors, may choose that which is better in your way than in ours. And I would see your guns nearby and observe your horses, that I may find out the limits of their power and grow used to them. In truth, Fernando, I would change places with you for a while. I have obtained from Montezuma the permission to be gone some days, telling him that I would go hunting, and I promised that

the new page I would leave in my place should be as loyal and have the same care for his comfort as I. It is a strange plan I have thought of, yet I doubt not the gods will help us in it, since it is not only for my own curiosity I undertake it, but that I may better prepare a future warrior for their land of Anahuac."

Fernando had listened without understanding. "I know not how you can have your desire," he said.

Ahuitzotl, seating himself on the rim of the stone basin, continued:

"I will tell to your ear, stranger, what I would not tell to any other page in the palace: many of the Caciques are angry with Montezuma because he has welcomed Malinche, and they plot already against his power, though I know not how they may harm him. And I know too of a surety that some of these Caciques have planned to kill Malinche now that Montezuma will not oppose him. If I were near him I could watch over him better than you, since I know from what quarter the danger would come. Doubtless too there are among your people those who believe that Montezuma's death would aid them." Fernando blushed, for he had heard one cavalier hint at this. "And so you on your side could shield the Emperor from their plots. We will exchange our places and our duties. I will disguise you so that your own mother would fail to recognize you. You shall be to Montezuma the new page I promised, and I will serve Malinche in your stead."

"Nay," cried Fernando angrily, "I will not do this thing, to let you go among my comrades, whom doubtless you are planning to harm. Rather would I die than betray them thus."

"By the gods! I seek no harm to them."

And there was such truth in Ahuitzotl's voice that Fernando was startled into belief in him. He listened more calmly to the Aztec's plan and to his threats. When he had heard it all he considered. If he refused he knew that Ahuitzotl would have him slain; moreover, if he were sure that no evil would come to the Spaniards through his consenting, the laws of chivalry, as well as his personal safety, bade him do his captor's bidding.

"You can warn Malinche to observe me closely," suggested Ahuitzotl, "if you are still in doubt; but can you not see that if I desired to harm him you could in turn do likewise to my Emperor? We will be hostages, one for the other's behaviour."

Finally Fernando was convinced and gave his consent. Ahuitzotl then left him and soon reappeared with his own slave, whose silence he could count on as his own. He handed a piece of paper made from aloe leaves to Fernando, who by means of a brush and paint given him, wrote the following letter:

To Señor Hernando Cortes,
Captain General of the Spanish Forces in New
Spain of the Ocean Sea.
Revered and dearest Master:

I am not slain by wild beasts as it was made appear to you, but am well, though detained in captivity. I send to you this Aztec youth, whose father holds me in duress, and I pray you of your good pleasure that you will do as he desires of you, since mine honour bids me ask it. Clothe him in my garments; let him serve you (Oh! that it were I who should look on you again when you read this!) and let him be taught the duties and business of a soldier, since one day he will be a great

Cacique and a leader of many men. I do believe, by the Saints above, that he intends you no harm. I am his hostage and he is mine. More than this I can not explain. When some day he returns to where I am now held then I shall be free to come back to you, dearest Master and most gallant Señor.

Your page

FERNANDO.

When this was written, greatly to the wonderment of Ahuitzotl, the slave came forward and took hold gently of Fernando. The Spanish boy instinctively resented his touch, but Ahuitzotl's stern glance was a hint to him that there would be no use in resenting it. The slave removed his garments, and stained him all over with a dusky red color. Then he put on him a cotton robe, sandals and the golden insignia worn by Montezuma's chief page, which permitted him to pass everywhere. He greased the dark hair of the boy and cut it in Aztec shape.

Fernando saw with dismay that Ahuitzotl did not yet consider the disguise sufficient and that the slave was making ready some sharp instrument, for what purpose he did not know. With a quick motion he pierced the lobes of Fernando's ears and the cartilage of his nose and inserted in them heavy rings of gold and shell. This was painful, and Fernando cried out angrily. The slave then rubbed some ointment to subdue the swelling and ease the pain. In addition he hung another split ring in his lower lip which, however, was not pierced. These ornaments so distorted the boy's features that he could now easily pass for an Aztec.

"You give me your promise," asked Ahuitzotl when the dis-

guise was finished, "the promise of a warrior, that you will not leave Montezuma, nor will betray yourself to your own people until I set you free?"

"I give you the word of a Spanish noble," replied Fernando proudly, feeling like a knight in some old tale, bound by the laws of chivalry to remain prisoner of a paynim captor until his ransom was paid.

So Ahuitzotl led him to the palace and spent the rest of the day in explaining his duties and making him familiar with the many apartments of the Emperor. Then he set off eagerly to present the magic paper to Cortes, who was indeed amazed at its contents and overjoyed at the news that Fernando was still alive. He had no fear that the Aztec boy could injure him, therefore he granted his request, repeated by Marina; and it gave him much amusement to watch how he took up his strange duties as page to the Spanish Captain General.

Fernando knew that if he were discovered he would be slain before there would be a chance of appealing to Cortes. He was ignorant of so many of the Aztec customs, so unfamiliar still with the innumerable chambers of the palace that he feared to betray himself any moment. He did make many mistakes, but these were attributed to the short time of his training by Ahuitzotl. Cacama, whose eye was on him constantly, managed frequently to give him a word of counsel. When he caught sight of himself in the dark pools of the gardens he shuddered at his changed features and did not wonder that no one suspected him of being other than an Aztec. The interior of the palace was generally darkened and even in the light no

one saw anything foreign in his appearance, because no one's imagination would ever have suggested that anyone but an Aztec could be Montezuma's servitor.

When Montezuma first saw him he said in a kindly tone:

"Fear not, my son, but be faithful as Ahuitzotl."

And Fernando, in recognition of this favor, made the Aztec salutation, touching his hand to the ground and then raising it to his head.

Princess Tecuichpo, the King's daughter, noticed the new page at once. He wondered when he saw her observing him whether she had any suspicion. But she was attracted only by something unfamiliar in his aspect, something she could not understand. She liked the strangeness and would often command him to attend her. One day she ordered him to carry for her a basket of rabbits to a certain shrine in the palace grounds that was dedicated to Ceuteutl, the Goddess of the Fields. When they arrived there she bade the page place the offerings in an enclosure on the altar from which the priests would take and kill them. Fernando hesitated. He recalled the stories of the early Christian martyrs who had died rather than sacrifice to the Roman gods. Now was he not called upon to refuse to lay an offering on the altar of this Mexican she-demon? Yet how could he refuse? His mind sought for a way out. With the basket in his hand he walked forwards, then he stumbled deliberately, fell to his knees, and the basket opening as it hit the ground, released the little prisoners, who scurried off into the thick shelter of an undergrowth.

"You are awkward, page," laughed Tecuichpo, who had not yet grown out of her gay girlish ways.

The Spaniards were eager to see the city thoroughly, and Montezuma willingly gave permission. The cavaliers rode and the soldiers followed on foot through the clean streets, watered each day from the canals, and were amazed at the signs of prosperity and orderly life. The markets attracted the men the most, with their shady porticos where the venders of fruits, skins and cottons, sat, and the jewelers and potters sold their wares for gold dust carried in little cubes, which was the currency of the country.

But Cortes longed to see from the inside the Great Teocalli which dominated the city. It was not as ancient nor as venerated as the shrine at Cholula, but it served as both barracks and temple, and thousands of soldiers or police were quartered in it. Montezuma at first hesitated, then after consulting the priests, he sent word that he would himself meet Malinche there at a certain hour.

Fernando accompanied the Emperor, and tried not to show the interest and terror he felt in this shrine to Huitzilopotchli, the dread God of War. The huge quadrangular wall was covered with figures of serpents in relief, and there were battlemented gates in the centre of each side. Within them were numerous smaller buildings devoted to the priests, in addition to the Great Teocalli itself. This temple had five stories or terraces, each one smaller than the one below, with a passageway all around each terrace and steps leading to the next one above.

As they waited in the courtyard, Montezuma in his palanquin and Fernando, fan in hand, by his side, the Spanish trumpets blew before the gate. Fernando's heart leaped as he

beheld again the beloved face of his master and those of Alvarado, Sandoval and other cavaliers. He longed to cry out to them, and instead he was forced to make the humble Aztec obeisance. He felt suddenly ashamed of his disguise, of the rings in his nose and lip. As he looked up again he saw that Cacama's gaze was on him, and he was certain that his life was in the hands of this one man who knew his secret.

He heard with pride how Cortes refused to be borne up the stairs on the shoulders of the priests and Caciques whom Montezuma had delegated to carry him as they carried their sovereign. When Cortes had climbed to the top Montezuma said:

"You are weary, Malinche, with climbing up our great temple."

"Nay, Montezuma," exclaimed Cortes, "the Spaniards are never weary."

They walked about the wide paved summit, and Fernando's eyes were drawn to the large jasper block in the centre whose shape was the same as the one to which he had been bound in Cholula. About it, at a lower level, were altars to many gods before which fires were burning. Cortes begged to be shown the shrines. Led by the priests, they entered a large apartment, the walls of which were painted with figures of the gods, and at the far end in a niche stood the gigantic idol of Huitzilopotchli, terrific of aspect, with a bow in his right hand and golden arrows in his left. A serpent of precious stones wound about his body, and to his left foot humming birds' wings were fashioned. About his neck was a chain of gold and silver hearts, symbols of the human hearts offered to him in sacrifice. The walls of this and the other shrines were darkened

with red spots, of what nature Fernando knew only too well. He found it difficult to keep his fingers from crossing himself, as those of his countrymen did, at the horrible sight.

When they had gone out into the clean air once more Cortes breathed deeply and said to Montezuma:

"I do not comprehend how a great and wise prince as you are can put faith in such evil spirits as these idols, the representatives of the Devil. If you will but permit us to erect here the true Cross, you will soon see how your false gods will shrink away."

Montezuma, whose kingly spirit had risen in this chief shrine of his city, answered angrily:

"These are the gods who have led the Aztecs on to victory since they were a nation, and who send the seed time and harvest in their seasons. Had I thought you would have offered them this outrage, I would not have admitted you into their presence."

Cortes realized that his religious zeal had carried him too far and that Montezuma's anger jeopardized the safety of them all. He therefore tried to smooth matters over, and succeeded in a degree, though the Emperor explained that he would have to remain at the shrine and perform certain ceremonies to placate the ire of the gods.

Fernando watched with a heavy heart the Spaniards depart and waited in the courtyard until Montezuma came out from the shrine, and sadly accompanied him back to the palace.

The sight of all these religious edifices made the Spaniards long for one of their own. With Montezuma's permission they turned one of their apartments into a chapel, and here

Ahuitzotl looked on in wonder as mass was first celebrated.

But Cortes was not satisfied. He had been a week in Tenochtitlan and seemed no nearer to his purpose of conquest. He had no intention of allowing some one else to rob him of the fruits of victory. He feared that some general might be sent from Spain or Cuba to supersede him, so that it behooved him to act quickly. He was absorbed in thought all that day, with no word to any of his officers. Ahuitzotl, who slept outside his door, heard him walking up and down all the night.

On the morrow Cortes called a council. He put before it the difficulties ahead of them, the possibility of an uprising of the Aztecs, a change in Montezuma's attitude towards them, the probability that Velasquez in Cuba would send another leader to finish the conquest they had carried so far, and the danger to them all even should they be willing to retreat to Vera Cruz. When each had expressed his opinion, Cortes put forward the bold plan he had conceived as he paced his room the night before, and after a first gasp of astonishment, the Council hailed it with enthusiasm.

Ahuitzotl in the court without had listened to the murmur of voices, though the only word he could understand was "Montezuma." Nevertheless, he was sure that some important step was being considered, and he feared that the Emperor was in danger. He began to regret that he had left him just now when he might have been of help. He determined to hasten at once to warn him, but when he approached the gate the sentinels waved him back. He had no better success at the other three gates, and even when he tried to press out unnoticed with Cortes, Alvarado, Sandoval, de Lujo, de Leon, de Avila

and the twenty-five soldiers who had been chosen for his secret purpose, Cortes smilingly ordered him to go back, and making gestures, explained that his new page should polish up his other weapons for him. He had grown interested in the boy, and valued him as the channel through which he would some time obtain news of Fernando. As soon as his great plan was carried out he meant to get the truth about him from Ahuitzotl.

The six cavaliers entered the palace for the audience Montezuma had granted at Cortes's request. At the sight of their suppressed excitement and from a few words they did not fear to speak aloud in Spanish, Montezuma's new page knew that something was planned against the master he had sworn to protect. Yet what could he do, he asked himself in desperation, thus caught between his two loyalties?

At first there were only kindly words between the monarch and the Spaniards and more giving of gifts. Fernando noted that every now and then three or four Spanish soldiers strolled into the audience hall as if out of mere curiosity, until there were twenty-five or thirty in all. Cortes too had noted their arrival. He began to speak, telling of word which had come of an attack upon his force left behind at Vera Cruz and of the death of some of them. He said that a certain Cacique Quauhpopoca was responsible for the trap into which they had been led.

"If that is so," replied Montezuma, who felt that this sudden accusation was serving as an excuse for some purpose he could not fathom, "here is my signet-ring. The Cacique shall be summoned immediately and I will judge him."

But this was not sufficient for Cortes.

"I know," he said, "that you are innocent of having acted through Quauhpopoca to slay my men. But it is not so easy for one at a distance to read aright. Our master, Emperor Charles, across the sea, may say: 'The Cacique dared not so act without the will of Montezuma.' In order therefore that he may have no doubt of your friendship, it would be wise, oh Montezuma, if you would take up your abode in the palace amongst us until this matter be settled."

At last it had come! this thunderbolt which the Aztec had felt coming so long before! Had the gods forsaken him that he knew not what to do? Then he cried proudly:

"When was it ever heard that a great prince like myself voluntarily left his own palace to become a prisoner in the hands of strangers?"

"You would not be a prisoner," Cortes explained, "but a monarch surrounded by your subjects and held in the greatest respect by all of us. 'Tis but a change such as you are often wont to from one palace to another."

"If I should consent to such a degradation," exclaimed the unconvinced Aztec, "my subjects never would. If you desire a hostage I will send you one of my sons and one of my daughters."

For a long time Spaniard and Aztec argued. Fernando, who could not know the causes which had led Cortes to make this demand, felt exceedingly sorry for Montezuma. He wondered why, in spite of the Spanish soldiers, he did not give the signal to fall upon the intruders and put an end once and for all to his humiliation at their hands.

Then Velasquez de Leon, wearied of the delay, cried out:

"Why do we waste words on this barbarian? We have gone too far to recede now. Let us seize him, and if he resists, plunge our swords into his body!"

At this speech Fernando, who even if he were the Aztec he was supposed to be and unable to understand the words, might well have been frightened by their tone alone, flung himself in front of the Emperor to protect the charge entrusted to him.

Montezuma turned to Marina and asked the meaning of what he had said.

"Go with them, King Montezuma," she pleaded. "If you will comply naught shall harm you, but if you refuse they threaten you with death."

Montezuma's heart told him that his hour had come. The prophecies of the priests, the awe of the white men as messengers of the gods, his own weakness and vacillation, had brought him to this moment. If he had acted differently, he thought, if . . . but now he believed it too late. If he had but died on the battle field fighting against these men who asked of him such an unheard of thing! Then he nodded his assent, and a triumphant smile lighted up Cortes's face. He frowned it back that he might not fail in courtesy to one he had just conquered.

Montezuma gave the last orders in his palace. The courtiers could not believe their ears. Preparations were hurriedly made, and then the Emperor and a large retinue set out to accompany the Teules to their quarters. All along the way his dejected subjects were murmuring that their sovereign was being carried off by force. A riot was starting when Monte-

zuma called to the people that he was going of his own free will.

At the palace of the Spaniards Montezuma was received as an honoured guest; his apartments were soon gorgeous as those he had left behind and were thronged with his wives, his children, his courtiers, and even folk from the street who came to convince themselves that their revered King had not been harmed.

But Montezuma knew that he would rather lie upon the sacrificial stone, an offering to the god, than sit in splendour in the palace of Malinche.

CHAPTER XVIII

Cortes Goes to Vera Cruz

WHILE the Council had been going on and before Montezuma had looked for the last time on the halls of his palace, Ahuitzotl was still seeking for a way to elude the vigilance of the sentinels and to escape to his master, to warn him of some approaching danger and to share it with him. Standing in the court not far from the stables, a sudden idea struck him—he would mount one of the horses and dash out of the gate! He had watched these strange beasts for days now and had lost his first terror of them. One of the soldiers had amused himself by helping him to mount and sit astride a horse and had shown him how it was guided by the bridle. He believed that, if his courage did not fail, he could succeed in managing one of them long enough to get past the sentinels. So he strolled to the spot where Cortes's horse, always saddled and bridled, was tied near one of the gates. He began to polish the brass ornaments on the saddle, and the soldiers, knowing that this was part of the page's duty, paid no attention to him. Then summoning all his courage, he put one foot in the stirrup and swung himself rather awk-

wardly on to the horse's back. But the nervous animal was conscious that this was neither his master nor a horseman of any kind. He reared up so quickly that even an experienced rider might have lost his seat, and Ahuitzotl was landed on the ground, where a kick from the horse's hoof left him unconscious.

It was almost a day later when he returned to his senses, and much had happened in the meantime of which he was ignorant. When he was able to leave his sleeping mat he heard with unbelieving ears of Montezuma's presence in Axayacatl's palace. His first impulse was to hasten to him at once; then second thoughts persuaded him that it might be wiser to keep himself free to come and go without having to ask the royal permission. He determined to seek his father, Cacama, in the town and to learn from him if the princes and Caciques were not planning a rescue of their monarch in which he could take part. He longed to retrieve the mistake he had made in leaving Montezuma; he felt as if he had deserted his post in battle. Now he would give his life to bring Montezuma back to his own. There was no difficulty now in passing through the gate amongst the many Aztecs who were allowed to visit the Emperor. So he was soon outside the walls, and Cortes in consequence found himself once more without a page. Fernando, bound by his promise, served Montezuma, still unknown to his countrymen, though some of them entered the royal apartments every day.

In his new abode Montezuma was surrounded by the same ceremony as that to which he had always been accustomed. By Cortes's command, no Spaniard was to fail to give him

every mark of respect. He set the example himself by standing bareheaded until Montezuma bade him be seated. Once one of the guard whose presence, though disguised as a guard of honour, showed the Emperor that he was indeed a prisoner, was discourteous to Montezuma, and Cortes had him severely punished.

Finally the Cacique Quauhpopoca arrived, accompanied by other chiefs who were accused of having killed the Spaniards near Vera Cruz. They were found guilty and to excuse themselves, they claimed, rightly or wrongly, that what they had done had been at the command of their sovereign, Montezuma. A terrible punishment was ordered by Cortes—they were burned alive in the courtyard!

Now at last the Conqueror had the excuse for showing Montezuma that his sovereignty in Anahuac was at an end, that by this act of treachery, as he called it, of which Quauhpopoca had accused him, Montezuma had forfeited his right to be treated as a loyal subject of the Spanish Emperor. Without asking permission he strode into Montezuma's apartment, where he found him reclining in the midst of the women of his household. They sprang up, frightened at this sudden intrusion, and gazed in amazement at the stern face of Malinche and at the stolid countenance of the soldier who followed bearing a pair of iron fetters in his hand.

Fernando, who had grown to love Montezuma, was equally troubled. He knew by looking at him that Cortes was in one of his hardest moods when he would carry out what he had determined, no matter at what cost. He loved him as dearly as ever and longed for the day when he might return to him;

but he had been so steeped in the spirit and ceremonial of the Aztec court that he had come to feel an almost Aztec reverence for Montezuma's person. What could it be that Cortes purposed to do, he wondered, as he took his place before the Emperor.

"Montezuma," said Cortes, omitting the customary greeting, "by your treachery you have merited death. And though you are a king, yet it is not meet that you should escape punishment altogether. Therefore you shall feel what it is like to wear the chains of a criminal."

Fernando's horror was as deep as that felt by Montezuma's household. He longed to plead with Cortes not to disgrace the Emperor thus, but he could not do this without breaking his promise to Ahuitzotl. As the soldier approached Montezuma to fasten the irons about the royal ankles, the boy threw himself down and put his hands around them to protect them. Montezuma gave him a sad smile, but the soldier shoved him aside and did his work.

Until Cortes had left the apartment there was no sound; then the disgraced King moaned to himself, all the proud blood of his warlike ancestors beating loudly in his veins. His wives ran to comfort him; his daughter Tecuichpo, who had been permitted by Guatemozin to accompany her father, sat at his feet and wrapped the ends of her mantle about the iron so that Montezuma's flesh might be spared contact with it. Fernando was scarcely less moved than the Aztecs. He had seen nothing but good in his temporary master, and though he did not waver in his loyalty to Cortes, he felt that here he had done an unnecessary act.

While Montezuma sat there, his features stony with distress, Ahuitzotl, clad in his own Aztec garments again, appeared and threw himself at his feet, uttering words of deference and devotion. The rising which he hoped to take part in was not yet ripe; but when he learned how Cortes had ordered Quauhpopoca and the Caciques to be executed and that he accused Montezuma of complicity with their deeds, the boy could stay away no longer. Montezuma was so moved by his own tragedy that he was scarcely conscious of his page's presence.

When the execution of the Caciques was over Cortes entered the apartment once more. He knelt at Montezuma's feet, unloosed the shackles and said:

"It has hurt me too, Montezuma, to punish you thus in the name of our Emperor. Let it now be forgotten, both the wrong and the punishment, and let us be friends again."

Though the fetters had been on him but a few hours, they had broken the spirit of Montezuma. Never again could he think of himself as the dread sovereign of Anahuac. Yet after a time he *seemed* to have forgotten. He gave audiences to his subjects as before; he watched with interest the drills of the Spaniards. He taught his captors to play *totoluque* with little quoits of gold, and he and one of his kinsmen would play against Cortes and Alvarado. His household was large and costly; he dined off golden dishes as he had done in the old days; he listened to the ardent words of Father Olmedo, who trusted that now he might bring about his conversion, and then Montezuma turned and prayed to his own gods.

Ahuitzotl, as soon as he perceived that his master had ears

for his story, could wait no longer to be reinstated in his old position.

"Go," he cried to Fernando, as he loosened from his mantle the golden signet of office, "go back to your Malinche. I give you back your freedom."

Montezuma had overheard part of this speech and commanded Ahuitzotl to explain. He was amazed at what he heard.

"Are you in truth a Spaniard?" he asked of Fernando incredulously.

"Yea, sire," the boy answered.

"And you have served me not only faithfully but kindly," the monarch continued. "You did twice seek to save me. Montezuma is your debtor; ask of him what you will."

And when Fernando would ask nothing, he filled his hands with jewels.

"Go to Malinche," he commanded, smiling at the thought of the surprise in store for his captor, "and tell him that Montezuma sends him as a rare gift his own page."

So Fernando made his obeisances and thanks to the Emperor and passed from his apartment to that of Cortes.

Cortes was seated, composing one of the letters he wrote to the Emperor Charles, in which he told him of all that had occurred since they had entered Tenochtitlan, when a messenger from Montezuma was announced. He looked up and recognized the page whom he had noticed constantly in attendance on the monarch. It was the first time he had really observed him, and while he waited for Marina to translate the royal words, he could not help noting the eyes of the lad, which

seemed strangely familiar. Fernando spoke in Aztec and Marina interpreted:

"Montezuma sends you another gift, oh great Cacique of the Teules, one which he greatly values, which he has tested and knows will please you. These are the words spoken through my mouth by our dread Lord."

"And what may that be, Marina?" Cortes asked; "some new dish or a rare bird by which they set such store?"

" 'Tis this page, Señor, a noble youth who says he will serve you faithfully."

"He comes at the right time," exclaimed Cortes, "since my late Aztec servitor left me so suddenly. I must even get hold of him without delay to learn where he hides Fernando. I would though that this new page could speak Spanish. It is hard to tell everything by gesture."

"Master!" cried Fernando, seizing Cortes's hand and covering it with kisses, "it is I, your Fernando."

Neither Cortes nor Marina could understand. They were thunderstruck to hear this Aztec talking with Fernando's voice. Then the quicker witted woman began to comprehend. She gently took out the massive ornaments from nose and lip, which soon regained their natural shape and size, and sought to rub off the dye from his face and hands; but it would not come off, nor did Fernando get rid of it completely for many days.

Cortes called loudly to all within hearing to come and see the marvel by which a white Christian had been made into a red heathen, and when the room was filled with cavaliers and soldiers, Fernando told his story. The affectionate feeling

which he had for Montezuma impressed his hearers, who now that they had him in their power were willing to forget all the rancour they had once cherished towards him. When they were alone and Fernando had exchanged his Aztec garb for his own hose and jacket, he knelt and begged Cortes's pardon for his disobedience.

"You have been punished enough, boy," his master replied, stroking his hair; "but if you run away again I will tie you to my saddle bow with a chain. Now go and bear my grateful thanks to Montezuma for his gift."

Each day thereafter Fernando would visit Montezuma, who was always glad to see him; and he and Ahuitzotl became friends, each desirous of making the Emperor forget the tragedy of his position.

Montezuma had agreed to make a public acknowledgment of his allegiance to the King of Spain. When his Caciques from far and near had assembled he spoke to them, saying that the Teules had been sent by Quetzalcoatl, according to the ancient prophecy.

"You have been faithful vassals of mine," he said with tears in his eyes, "during the many years that I have sat on the throne of my fathers. I now expect that you will show me this last act of obedience by acknowledging the great king beyond the waters to be your lord, also that you will pay him tribute in the same manner as you have hitherto paid it to me."

Though there were murmurs of objection, the Caciques could not disobey this last command of their Emperor, and all took a solemn oath of allegiance to a sovereign whose ex-

istence was to them more legendary than that of the god whose kinsmen the Teules were said to be.

Now Cortes, mindful of the appetite in Spain for gold, which had been whetted by the first treasure sent across the seas, suggested to Montezuma that a regular tribute from all over the country should be collected for Emperor Charles. This was done, and Montezuma contributed an additional treasure which had been hoarded by his own father Axayacatl in the very palace now occupied by the Spaniards. It was a glittering sight to Spanish eyes when it was all spread out on the stone floor: gold dust, golden bars, collars, fans, wondrous ornaments of gold and precious stones. This Cortes divided into portions, allotting one-fifth for the royal share. But there was great dissatisfaction. Large as the treasure was, when divided, the individual portions were not sufficient for men who had dreamed of gold as plentiful as sand on the seashore. The common soldiers cried out that they had not risked their lives to win so small an amount; and again Cortes had to harangue them into peace and contentment, telling them that this was but the beginning of the fortunes that should be theirs.

In still another direction the Spaniards were dissatisfied. Though they now had a chapel inside of their palace, they desired to celebrate their religion before the Aztecs so that the heathens might become familiar with the sight of the Cross and their rites, and be led the sooner away from their idols. Against his will, Montezuma gave to them a temple for this purpose. But when the Aztecs beheld the statues of their gods removed from this smaller teocalli to make way for Chris-

tian saints, their horror and anger burst forth. Montezuma warned Cortes that the gods had been offended by this act, and that if this sacrilege were not put an end to they would desert the land and their worshipers.

"I tell you this," declared Montezuma, speaking with firmness and more majesty than he had shown since he had left his own palace, "that you may be warned. If you have any regard for yourselves you will leave the country without delay. I have only to raise my finger and every Aztec in the land will rise in arms against you."

Cortes had seen for some days that the feelings of the Aztecs against them had been growing steadily fiercer, that even the presence of Montezuma among the Spaniards might be insufficient to keep his subjects from rising against the invaders. The situation was indeed serious and he was uncertain of the outcome. He now replied that he should be willing to leave with his army for the coast, but that he had no ships there to bear them back to Cuba. Then, whether to satisfy Montezuma or to provide himself against a possible need in the future, he sent workmen to Vera Cruz to start the building of these ships.

He knew now that all his troubles were not behind him, that it would require wary conduct to prevent an outburst of the Aztecs; that he must sleep with one eye open, as it were. He inspected his means of defense and tightened his discipline.

Then came the news which took him away from Tenochtitlan, where he was so needed. He learned that his old enemy Velasquez, Governor of Cuba, had sent another expedition under Panfilo de Narvaez to conquer Mexico and to seize and punish

Cortes for what he termed his rebellion. This de Narvaez had already disembarked with his force from several ships at Vera Cruz. Cortes was drawn in two ways. He could not allow this newcomer to ruin all his work; yet he feared that if he left matters would go wrong. However, after much deliberation, he decided that he must go against de Narvaez to prevent him from stirring up trouble throughout the land.

"I appoint you governor in my absence, Pedro," he informed Alvarado. "See that you are in very truth a second self to me. Be prudent as you are brave. Guide your tongue as you guide your steed, and rein in your impetuous spirit. And first of all guard Montezuma as if he were St. Peter with the keys of heaven. He is hostage to us for the good will of his people. Show him ever the proper deference, since it is not only what belongs to a king, but is also the policy that is safest for us. Remember that if king and city have no cause for complaint you can sleep in quiet; but if once they are roused against our small force we shall be blown like seafoam before the wind."

When Cortes told Montezuma of his projected departure, the Aztec failed to comprehend why if de Narvaez were a Spaniard, it was so necessary to go against him; but Cortes explained that he was a traitor who must be vanquished.

And so, with forebodings that he should not find Tenochtitlan the same when he returned Cortes, accompanied by Fernando and seventy soldiers, set out for the coast.

Alvarado was very proud of his trust. The Aztecs liked him; his fair skin and light hair and his impetuous sunny smile made *Tonatiuh,* as they called him, the most striking of all the

Spaniards. Montezuma also had felt his charm, and would often send for him to walk in the gardens or play *totoloque* in his apartments. There was no better warrior among all the Conquerors, as he was shortly to show; yet he lacked the wisdom and patience of Cortes, whose caution as a rule balanced his vehemence. He was so eager that everything should go well during Cortes's absence, so aware of the anger which had been aroused among the populace by the slight put upon their gods, that he thought he saw evidences everywhere of plots for an uprising. It may be that he was right when later he justified himself for his acts by saying that he had done what he did in order to prevent the Aztecs from rising before he was ready for them. Cortes and others of the Conquerors did not believe him, nor was it ever decided just what his real motive had been.

There were indeed plots to rescue Montezuma, even though Alvarado may never have known anything definite about them. Ahuitzotl, who was now looked upon by the great Caciques as a full grown warrior and valuable in his knowledge of the ways of the Teules, could have told much about them when he returned daily to Montezuma's apartments from the city. But he did not breathe a word of them there, not wishing to give the Emperor a chance to forbid his subjects to act or to burden the royal mind with knowledge of which it was better for him to be ignorant in case their plans miscarried.

Ahuitzotl no longer felt bound by honour, as he had felt bound while serving Cortes as his page, to refrain from working against the Spaniards. Now was the time, he told Cacama,

for which he had been so long training, when he would make use of the strength, the knowledge, the wiles of an Aztec warrior to fight for Anahuac, its king and its gods.

On that fateful day in May he warned the Caciques not to trust the Teules. He had no information as to what Alvarado planned to do. Yet from a certain suppressed excitement among the Spaniards which he noticed when he visited Montezuma, and by a kind of instinct he felt sure something grave was on foot. So he himself and those he was able to influence stayed away from the festival.

Huitzilopotchli, the War God, could not be asked to give up his great yearly festival because the Teules had taken over one of the teocallis where part of the ceremonial always took place, with its songs, dances and sacrifices and much burning of incense till the worshipers fell to the ground, their senses overcome. And so the Spaniards, when petitioned for the temporary use of the court of the teocalli, were pleased to grant it. Six hundred or more Caciques and warriors of the noblest families, clothed in their most gorgeous costumes and priests in their festive robes gathered therein. Then, while absorbed in a dance, Alvarado and his soldiers fell upon them and caught them as in a net, killing until the slippery pavement ran with streams of blood, as one who was there present told afterwards, like water in a heavy shower.

The cries of the terrified Indians reached the ears of the unhappy Montezuma, who sent slaves running to find out what dread fate had overwhelmed his subjects; and Ahuitzotl also, who had lingered not far from the teocalli, rushed

away to the leaders of the conspiracy to tell them that the Teules had themselves given the signal for the Aztecs to rise against them.

All that night the streets of Tenochtitlan were filled with men hurrying to and fro. The priests bade the citizens fight for their offended gods; the Caciques stirred their followers by tales of Spanish cruelty at Cholula, and the young warriors were eager for the morrow that they might make names for themselves.

That night Ahuitzotl, owing still to the liberty which was his to come and go between the city and the Palace, was not refused admission at the gates. But the Spanish soldiers eyed him suspiciously. He hurried to the apartments of Montezuma, where he found the Emperor standing before a shrine, his arms uplifted in supplication to the gods. The boy knelt down behind him and waited until his master's prayers were over. Montezuma when he turned could not fail to see that his page was greatly excited.

"What words are those that your heart forces to your lips, Ahuitzotl?" he asked, seating himself on a stool. "You can speak here freely," he continued; "the women in the room beyond are so far off and so affrighted that they cannot hear you."

"How shall I speak," asked Ahuitzotl, still kneeling but with face uplifted, "and not offend you? Yet how shall I keep silence and not wrong you?"

"Whatever your words, I shall listen," said Montezuma kindly. "Speak!"

The boy spoke hurriedly: "I and the Caciques who know of my coming, my Master, have no right nor desire to learn why you became the guest of Malinche. We know only that the city and your land call for you to come back to them, away from the Teules. Malinche is now away and surely, we say, the time is come when our Lord will return to us. You have heard today the cries of your children when the Teules slaughtered them. You will not wait longer to come to their aid?"

Montezuma's expression had not changed; he did not mean then, thought Ahuitzotl, to smite him for his boldness in speaking so plainly, so he continued:

"Forgive me if I must speak as I have never dared speak to my Lord before. My reverence has not lessened; but there is need of haste and that one should speak plainly. Tomorrow at dawn your people will make an assault on the walls in order to overcome the Teules and to free their Emperor. You who know how strong their defences are here know how many thousands will be slain before the white men are beaten down and way is made for you to pass out through the gates."

He stopped again to give Montezuma a chance to speak; but whatever the monarch's thought, he showed no intention of uttering it until his page had finished.

"If you were once safely on the other side of these walls, then the Teules would know that they were powerless; they would know that only your presence amongst them kept us from driving them forth. Oh! Lord Montezuma, I know a way. There is a secret passage beneath the chamber wherein

was stored the treasure of your royal father which leads beneath the gateway into your own palace. The High Priest told me of it this day."

He ceased and waited for the Emperor to give his answer to the unspoken question.

Though Montezuma's features, trained doubly to hide the emotions of a warrior and of a monarch, had not betrayed him, yet while Ahuitzotl was speaking he had not been the stolid unmoved statue he appeared. His heart leapt at the thought of freedom once more, of ruling his people as in the old days before the Teules entered his land. Was it indeed possible that he might bring back those days? Then his heart sank. The thought of Cortes overpowered his hope. He knew, whether his people did or not, that the gods or fate had sent this man, and that his will was stronger than the Aztec's will.

It cost him an effort to speak as he did:

"I thank you for your loyalty, Ahuitzotl; but you mistake. Montezuma will not crawl like a mole below the ground. When his friend Malinche returns, they will go together through the streets of Tenochtitlan."

Ahuitzotl saw that further pleading was hopeless. His one idea was to leave the palace while he could. So, when Montezuma turned again with his prayers to the god, apparently forgetting his presence, he strolled again out through the gates, smiling at the soldiers who recognized him. He would have liked to explore the underground passage himself, but there was no time, and he dared not disappear secretly. He knew that he must do nothing which would make the Spaniards sus-

picious of him, at least as long as there was no open warfare between the city and the palace of Axayacatl.

Before sunrise the attack began on the palace of Axayacatl. The Spaniards, though they were prepared for one, had not imagined that it would be so furious. Hundreds of Aztecs scaled the walls for every fifty that were thrown down and others tried to set fire to the battlements. It looked indeed as if their attack must be successful, when Montezuma appeared on the summit of the walls. At the sight of their revered Emperor the uproar ceased so that his voice could be heard to the farthest ranks of his people.

"My children," he cried, "will ye burn the very roof over your sovereign's head, or seek ye to kill him with your arrows?"

The leaders, now realizing the danger in which their onslaught placed Montezuma, called a retreat and met to consider what plan they should follow. They decided upon a siege so that they might starve the Teules. For fourteen days they encamped about the walls, and the besieged found their provisions and water supply perilously low. Some of the Spaniards had been killed and many wounded, and their hearts sank at the thought of the future. They were loud in their complaints against Alvarado and the plight he had dragged them into. Cortes was now their only hope, and he was far away.

Alvarado managed to send a Tlascalan messenger through the barrier of the besiegers. He reached Cortes at Vera Cruz where, after a short but important campaign, he had overcome de Narvaez.

"By my conscience!" swore the angry Cortes, "I had better

have left you, Fernando, to govern in my place rather than Alvarado."

Within the shortest possible time he had turned towards Tenochtitlan, stopping not for fatigue nor dangers on the road.

"On, El Romo!" he would say to his steed which he had secured from one of de Narvaez' forces. "We can eat and rest in a king's palace at our journey's end."

As they neared Tenochtitlan he saw in the empty streets of the towns through which they passed or in the scowls on the faces of the folk they met along the roadside the sign of the change which had taken place during their absence. At the gates of the city it looked for a moment as if their entry would not be undisputed. But evidently other counsels prevailed among the Aztec leaders, and as they crossed the drawbridges Cortes ordered the trumpets sounded to signal his return to the besieged.

Montezuma came forth to meet him at the palace, but Cortes, whose anger had boiled up within him all the way from Vera Cruz, scarcely spoke to him. When he had reached his own quarters he sent an Aztec to the Emperor.

"Go, tell your master and his people to open the markets, or we will do it for you."

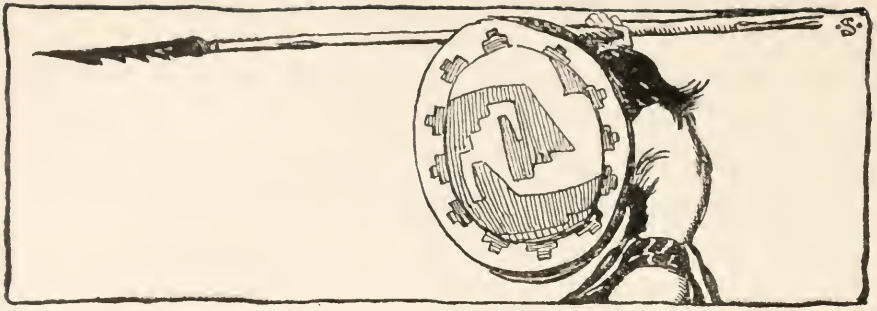
Alvarado too was overwhelmed by the torrent of Cortes's anger.

"You have done badly," he cried after he had rejected scornfully his lieutenant's stammered excuses. "You have been false to your trust. Your conduct has been that of a madman."

Yet there was no time for Cortes to indulge in this justi-

fiable resentment. He heard the cry of the sentinels on the ways: "The city is all in arms! The drawbridges are raised. The enemy will soon be upon us!"

And Cortes knew that he must bend all his energy to defend his force.



CHAPTER XIX

Capture of the Great Teocalli

SPANIARDS and Tlascalans were ready for the assault when it came, yet to the besieged the advancing human waves seemed to have no end. The almost naked bodies of the hosts glistened in the sun, and the feather-covered shields and mantles of the Caciques gave them the appearance of huge tropical birds, to which the grotesque painted helmets with plumes contributed. And just as a summer hurricane shakes down to death the birds in the branches, so the Spanish guns laid low many of these feathered warriors.

"They had only half believed the tales the Cholulans told them of our artillery," said Bernal Diaz, turning round, fuse in hand, from the gun he was preparing to fire for a second time. "See, Fernando, how they run. Even the infernal din of their serpent-skin drums and whistles is silenced."

But it was only for a short time that the dreadful opening in the ranks was to be seen; then it filled up over the dead and wounded and the wave came on again, up to the foot of the walls, which the Aztecs tried to mount, shooting stones from

their slings as they went that injured many of the defenders. Pushed back from the summit, they battered at the foot of the wall and shot blazing arrows over it onto the wooden portions of the palace. These caught fire, and the Spaniards dashed about vainly trying to extinguish the flames with the small quantity of water that remained in them, until they imitated the Tlascalans and used earth for this purpose. Even this was not sufficient and the conflagration stopped only when it reached the principal buildings of stone.

All day long the fight raged, and Cortes, who was everywhere that it was hottest, ordering the guns into a great breach in one of the walls, encouraging, inspiring all the defenders, wondered if the day would never end. Knowing the Aztec method of fighting, he looked for a cessation at nightfall. And indeed both sides were glad of these hours of comparative repose.

Early next morning Fernando held the stirrup for Cortes, and soon all the cavaliers were in the saddle, the guns massed at the gate, and the Spaniards and the Tlascalans rushed out before the Aztecs were ready to attack. The impetus of their charge and the missiles from the guns drove the Aztecs back to a barrier they had hurriedly thrown up. Then they rallied and took their toll of Spanish lives. Again the Spaniards pushed them back, and again they themselves were halted. Not only were they in danger from arrows, slings and the *maquahuitl* (a wooden blade with sawlike projections of obsidian along the sides), of the hosts before them, but from the azoteas of the houses on either side rained down arrows and stones.

Every cavalier sought to outdo his comrades in daring—Sandoval, de Olid, Ordaz and the others; but Alvarado had a double reason for the almost superhuman efforts he made, since he hoped to force Cortes to forget his error. Fernando had not much trouble in persuading Cortes to let him accompany him as his squire, since even if his master had wished to keep him out of danger, he was scarcely worse off in this sortie than in the palace which other Aztec forces were constantly attacking. He had caught sight of Ahuitzotl several times that day, fighting at the head of a force he supposed was made up of the retainers of his father, Cacama; and he noted that these men advanced in a formation different from the usual Aztec way, so that he felt sure that they had been trained by Ahuitzotl, who had put to use his observations of the white men's soldiering.

Xicotencatl had not slept the night before, after Cortes had informed him that he intended making a sally at dawn. His one thought had been that at last he could fight the hated Aztec, and he vowed by his mountain ancestors that that day should see the long-awaited combat with Guatemozin.

The time was near at hand. Guatemozin's royal blood urged him to the front ranks of those who had sworn to drive the hated invaders from the land. The Prince was clothed in cotton-quilted armour; his mantle and shield of feather work bore his insignia. But behind the soft looking ornaments were a covering of tough hide on the shield, and a human body perfect in strength. The Tlascalan's body was less protected; his yellow and white feathers hung from his helmet over a rough mantle of rabbit-skin that was his only garment.

Guatemozin heard the call of his foe and cried out in return. "At last, Tlascalan!"

There was no need for any preliminaries; each of the two nobles had dreamed too long of matching his strength against that of the other. Xicotencatl cast his javelin at his opponent, aiming for his neck, at the opening between the helmet and the plate of silver which covered the cotton cuirass. Its point glanced aside, scratched the right shoulder, and Xicotencatl drew it back quickly by the thong that attached it to his arm, before the Prince was able to cut it with his maquahuitl. Then Guatemozin threw his javelin, which pierced the lobe of the Tlascalan's ear. The javelins now darted forth and back again, swift as the tongues of lizards, and each time the point drew blood, though no vital spot had been struck. Xicotencatl fought not only his personal fight with a warrior whom his pride urged him to vanquish, but also the fight of his people against their ancient foe. The Aztec, on the contrary, had almost forgotten the past enmity with the mountain stranger these last few days in the face of the present desperate struggle with the invading Teules. He fought now because he joyed in it, because he had sworn to give Xicotencatl an equal chance, and because he did not purpose to be worsted for the first time in his life.

The battle ranged close about them; none except those on the azoteas could stand idly and watch the combatants so evenly matched. The Aztec's javelin, launched with his utmost strength, had pierced through his opponent's corselet and hung quivering in his breast. With a mighty effort Xicotencatl wrenched it out and cut the thong, and then raising his

maquahuitl, he brought it down with terrible force upon the Aztec's shoulder, its cruel blades cutting deep into the flesh while the blow bore him to his knees.

Xicotencatl laughed aloud in triumph. He had not heard the bugle call by which Cortes was recalling his forces until he could sweep the street with the guns for another advance. And even if he had heard, he would not have obeyed. It had always irked him to follow the commands of the Spaniards. Now he had his enemy before him and Xicotencatl meant to give him his final blow before he could rise again.

But while the weapon was lifted in the air, the cannon behind the two warriors flashed and roared, and a ball hitting the side of the house before which they were fighting, blew the wall into pieces, one piece of which, falling outward, knocked both Aztec and Tlascalan senseless to the ground.

When they recovered consciousness they could hear the advance of the Spaniards into the street at right angles to them. Guatemozin spoke first, breathing with difficulty from the weight on his chest and the dust which covered his face.

"Tlascalan," he said, "the Teules have injured us both. Is it not a sign from the gods of that which may come both to my nation and to yours? We have fought each other, and this time perchance . . . perchance you had got the better of me. If we both succumb to our wounds will it not be the white men who will benefit? Think, Tlascalan, whither the friendship of your nation for these strangers leads it. What will they do with your Tlascala if they succeed in laying Anahuac low, which the gods forbid?"

He ceased for a moment, and Xicotencatl was lost in

thought. His lust for fighting Guatemozin had passed; he too was bleeding, and the loss of blood seemed to clear his brain. The Aztec's words startled him—they were like the echo of his own imaginings. From the first he had feared the advent of the Spaniards and had fought them and disputed with his own people to prevent the alliance. It was only the command of the Republic which had made him accompany Cortes to Tenochtitlan.

"By the gods, Aztec," he exclaimed, "my heart answers your words."

"Then," cried Guatemozin, who had managed to extricate himself from the ruins which had half buried him and who was now helping Xicotencatl to free himself, "turn back to Tlascala and force your people to harken to their danger. My spirit sees dark things when it peers into the future, but it may be the gods shall help us escape the fates that mine eyes seem to see hanging over us."

"I too see dark clouds hanging over the mountains of my land, Guatemozin," replied Xicotencatl, at last scrambling to his feet, "and I will return to Tlascala as soon as I may and do whatever one man can do."

Then the two nobles separated, the Prince to go by byways around the Spanish force to his palace to have his wounds dressed, and Xicotencatl to the Spanish quarters, where his wounds were sufficient excuse for his taking no further part in the fighting.

Though the Spaniards had been able that day to drive the Aztecs before them by the use of the artillery, they could not *keep* them back. And when night was falling Cortes, him-

self wounded after his heroic rescue of one of his cavaliers, retreated to the palace. He realized that there was little gained for all the brave fighting of the day. Many Aztecs were indeed killed, but there seemed no end of others to take their places, and his own loss, though small in numbers, was a serious one on account of the impossibility of replenishing his ranks. While Fernando bound up his master's wounds he could not take his eyes off Cortes's anxious countenance. At last the Captain came to a decision.

"Go to Montezuma, boy," he said in a voice that showed his deep discouragement, "and say that I ask if he will not command his subjects to cease this warfare against us. What shall it profit them or us to continue it?"

Montezuma smiled as always when he observed his former page before him, but when he listened to Cortes's message he frowned and turned away. He had not forgiven Cortes's treatment of him on his return from Vera Cruz.

"What have I to do with Malinche?" he exclaimed. "I do not wish to hear from him. I desire only to die. To what state has my willingness to serve him reduced me?"

Then when Father Olmedo and de Olid, who had followed Fernando, sought to persuade him he added:

"It is of no use. They will neither believe me nor the false words and promises of Malinche. You will never leave these walls alive."

But Father Olmedo pleaded again:

"Speak to them, oh King; bid them cease their warfare, and we to the last man will depart from Tenochtitlan and the land of Anahuac." And Fernando added his prayers also,

speaking in Aztec: "Stay their hands, I beseech you, Lord Montezuma. I know that your people will obey you, whose word is louder to their hearts than the beating of blood in their own veins. Bid them cease, I pray you, my Master."

Then Montezuma turned his face towards them and said:

"Once more then will I serve you and bid my people to let you go in peace."

He ordered his slaves to robe him in his finest mantle of white and blue, inset and fastened with emeralds and other stones, and to put golden sandals on his feet and the golden diadem of the Aztec Emperors on his head. The touch of this crown brought back the old feeling of royal power and dignity; and never since the day the Spaniards entered Tenochtitlan had his nobles beheld him walk so firmly nor speak so royally. All his own officers surrounded and proceeded him, and Cortes, followed by his lieutenants, joined the procession that mounted to the highest turret.

Among the assailants who gazed in astonishment and awe at the Emperor was Ahuitzotl. He had obtained permission to resign his duties as page and to join his father. He called out to his retainers to cease fighting, and everywhere the conflict was interrupted. Men looked on Montezuma as men gaze on the sun after an arctic night. He had shown his countenance again, now they thought all must be right. A few more blows and they would rescue him from those who kept him by force from his own people. There was a deep silence; then Montezuma spoke:

"Why do I see my people here in arms against the palace of my fathers? Is it that you think your Sovereign a prisoner

and wish to release him? But you are mistaken. I am no prisoner. The strangers are my guests. I remain with them only from choice and can leave them when I list. Have ye come to drive them from the city? That is unnecessary. They will depart of their own accord if ye will open a way for them. Return to your homes then. Lay down your arms. Show your obedience to me who have a right to it. The white men shall go back to their own land, and all shall be well again within the walls of Tenochtitlan."

The hope with which the multitude had listened to the first words of their Emperor had quickly changed to furious anger and scorn of one who thus disgraced his ancestors. No longer could they keep silent. One Cacique cried out: "Base Aztec, woman, coward!" And others shouted: "The white men have made you a woman—fit only to spin and weave!"

But even this outlet was not sufficient for the force of their patriotic ire. One noble aimed his javelin and would have thrown it, but the horrorstruck Ahuitzotl sprang forward and wrenched it from his hand. But others, moved by the same impulse, threw stones at the turret, and one hit Montezuma on the head with such force that he fell to the ground senseless.

Once more there was a sudden silence, a silence of terror and regret. The multitude, as if chased by their own consciences, fled down the streets in all directions, in any direction so that it led away from this scene of desecrated sovereignty.

Below in his apartments, whither they had borne him, Montezuma lay on his sleeping mat and refused all aid. Tecuichpo, his daughter, his wives, his children, his courtiers—none

would prevail upon him to be comforted or to let his wound be dressed. Life had no further hold on his spirit; he was eager to be gone, to meet in some region of shade Quetzalcoatl, who would explain to his ancestors that the reason their descendant had not opposed the Teules was because he believed them sent by the god.

Meanwhile Ahuitzotl's heart was sick with longing to see his master. He called out to some Tlascalan soldiers on the walls, and implored them to send for Fernando. And when the latter appeared, he pleaded with him to get him admission into the palace and into Montezuma's chamber. Cortes gave his consent, and Ahuitzotl, though Montezuma did not notice his presence, took up lovingly his old duties and would allow no other page to serve him. Fernando too spent as much time as he could spare in the apartment, and the two youths vied with each other in the care of their former master.

Cortes decided on another blow which, he trusted, would be so severe as to bring the Aztecs to terms. The heart of the city and of their religion was, he knew, the Great Teocalli. This he intended to capture and to dislodge the Aztecs who were throwing missiles from it upon the palace.

After a first storming party had been repulsed, Cortes called for Fernando.

"Bind my shield upon this hand," he cried; "my wound shall not keep me idle when great deeds must be wrought."

And with a picked force of three hundred Spaniards and several thousand Indian allies, he made his way into the court-yard of the Great Teocalli. Here part of the foe awaited them, and the horses who should have scattered them slipped

upon the smooth surface of the pavement and could not advance.

"To our own feet then!" commanded Cortes, swinging himself down from his saddle. He sent the precious steeds back to the palace, then he and Sandoval, Alvarado, Ordaz and others dashed at the lower steps of the pyramid and held it until his supporting troops came up. The Aztecs in the court were overpowered and taken prisoners, and the Tlascalans, minus Xicotencatl, who had kept himself in his own quarters since his fight with Guatemozin, were left to guard the court.

Like an uncoiled spring, the Spaniards rushed upon the Aztecs on the teocalli steps, driving them before them by sword blows and musket shots, until they gained the level foothold of the first terrace. And the Aztecs fought as they had never fought before; not even when they were trying to free their sovereign; now they were fighting in defence of their gods. After the assailants had forced them upward from the first terrace, they flung stones and shot javelins and arrows with such rapidity that the air was darkened by them and from every one of the slippery, fatal steps a Spanish body fell to the court below.

In fierce rushes the Spaniards gained, driving with heads down and breathless, the Aztecs before them, until they stood upon the open summit of the temple. It was like coming into the very heart of a thunderstorm or into the bowels of a volcano, where human fury was as destructive as lightning or molten fire. The Aztec warriors and priests fought desperately. Two of them, slashing right and left, made their way to Cortes, whom they seized. They dragged him to the edge

of the parapet to throw him over. He knew that no one could save him; there was not a Spaniard whose arms were not warding off death blows from his own head. With a prayer to the saints for strength, he wrenched himself backwards and out of their grasp, and so violently that one of the Aztecs was hurled over the edge. Then Cortes turned and saw that victory was with his men, that the defenders were all killed or being taken prisoners.

"God and the Lord Jesus be praised," he cried joyously. "Come, friends, let us put an end to their horrible god."

They rushed into the shrine and, like hounds upon a boar, tore down the frightful image of Huitzilopotchli, the God of War, dragged it to the parapet and sent it crashing down to the pavement below, while the Aztecs on nearby azoteas who witnessed this deed cried aloud in horror.

That night Cortes made another sortie, burning many houses; and the next day he mounted with Marina to the turret of the palace and bade her call out to the Caciques and people below that he had burned their houses and temple and destroyed their idols.

"All this," he said, "you have brought on yourselves by your rebellion. Yet for the affection the sovereign you have so unworthily treated still bears you, I would willingly stay my hand if you will lay down your arms and return once more to your obedience. But if you do not I will make your city a heap of ruins and leave not a soul alive to mourn over it!"

Cortes waited now for a sign of submission, but none came. Instead a Cacique, whom Fernando believed to be Prince Guatemozin, though his head-dress hid his face, called out:

"You have in truth wrought cruelly upon a folk that welcomed you, oh Malinche; yet even should you slay thousands more of us, we are content if we spill the blood of one white man. "Look," he pointed, "on our terraces and streets, see them still thronged with warriors as far as your eye can see. Our numbers are scarcely diminished by our losses. Yours are lessening every hour. You perish from hunger and sickness. You must soon fall into our hands."

He paused a moment and then he cried in triumph:

"*The bridges are down,* and ye cannot escape! The gods will take vengeance."

Even Cortes's stout heart shook. He realized now that what the Cacique said was true. And his men were panic-stricken. He hurried them down from the turret that the Aztecs might not see how they crowded about him, demanding that he find some way to lead them at once from the city. And again Cortes had to feed them with his own courage.

For a day or two he fought in the streets, by the canals, to discover if in truth the bridges were down, at the same time parleying with the Aztecs in his endeavour to get his army safely out of Tenochtitlan. He hoped still that by taking Montezuma with him, he could shield their exit.

And then came the news that Montezuma was dying!

CHAPTER XX

La Noche Triste

"HE *will* not live," exclaimed Princess Tecuichpo, weeping, to Ahuitzotl. "He has no desire to live. See, he has grown weaker hour by hour."

Montezuma's daughter and his page gazed sadly at the wounded Emperor, who lay on his mats with eyes closed or when open fixed and unseeing. They knew that he was dying more from a broken heart than from the results of the blow.

Fernando, who had come in to learn of his condition, hurried to report it to Cortes.

"Go, Father Olmedo," commanded Cortes, "and see if you can do naught to strengthen the body, and if not, then fight lustily with the devil for his soul. Make him die in the Christian faith, and I will hail you a greater conqueror than I thought myself to be."

Father Olmedo did his best. He knelt by the side of the dying Emperor and besought him to become a Christian.

Montezuma pushed the crucifix firmly aside, saying:

"I have but a few minutes to live, and I will not at this hour desert the faith of my fathers."

Then he turned his face away, and thought of the days when he served the gods as a priest, of the early morning sacrifices when the incense smoke rose upwards from the teocalli white, yet less white than the snow on the peak of Popocatepetl. Later he asked to see Cortes, and with their leader came into the apartment many of the Spaniards who had grown to love the Emperor. Bernal Diaz, who was one of these, said afterwards: "The tidings of his death were received with real grief by every cavalier and soldier in the army who had had access to his person, for we all loved him as a father—and no wonder, seeing how good he was!"

"Malinche," said Montezuma, his countenance softening as he beheld Cortes's genuine sorrow, "I am dying. Others must bear the weight now of Anahuac on their shoulders. I am no longer king. But I have still wives and children, and for them I fear. Will you care for them, my greatest treasure?"

Cortes motioned that he would do so, and a smile of relief lit up Montezuma's face.

"Let them not go destitute," he begged; "out of all my riches let some remain with them. Your lord, the Emperor, will do this, if it were only for the friendly offices I have rendered the Spaniards, and for the love I have shown them—though it has brought me to this condition! But"—he added faintly—"but for this I bear them no ill will."

Cortes promised by a sign and by words which Fernando

interpreted. Then Montezuma, his last duty done, sank back into the arms of Ahuitzotl, dead!

Cortes turned sadly from the chamber where the dead Emperor lay, surrounded by his mourning family and household. He too, except for the angry moment on his return from Vera Cruz, had looked upon Montezuma as a friend. Now that he was gone Cortes knew that their last stay had vanished. He called his officers together to decide when the evacuation should begin. Some counselled the day and some the night; each had its advantages and its dangers, and the night was finally chosen.

The soldiers were told to make ready their baggage, and the cry went up about the treasure. Cortes knew that they must leave much of it behind, as they could not be burdened with it on their retreat. He had it all spread out upon the floor of one of the large halls and told each man to take what he could carry easily.

"'Tis hard to decide amidst such riches," complained Bernal Diaz to Fernando while both were hesitating. "I think, though, that I will leave the heavy gold for other shoulders and content myself with these four green stones the Aztecs call *chalchivitl,* if that's the word. You remember how Montezuma counted them as his most precious jewels."

Fernando, not so wise, filled his pockets with golden chains and ornaments. Then he went at Cortes's command to bid, with all courtesy, Princess Tecuichpo and another daughter and son of Montezuma and certain Caciques who were of the household, to prepare to leave the palace. They were to go with the Spaniards as hostages and would receive, he said, the

deference due their rank and their sorrow. He reminded them that Cortes would not forget the promise he had made to their father and master to care for their welfare.

The horses' hoofs were muffled, and the wheels of the guns were oiled, and, most important of all, a temporary bridge was constructed to be laid over the openings in the causeway from which the Aztecs had carried off the drawbridges. These were entrusted to one Magarino, who had forty soldiers in his detachment.

Then sadly and silently the army moved out of the gate of the palace of Axayacatl, out into the open square, and down the empty street. The night was dark, but the white houses marked the way on either side. Like some spectral procession, without a word, it passed between the walls where only a few weeks before it had marched in triumph.

Fernando rode by Cortes's side, and once when in his nervousness he let his musket hit against the horse's armour, Cortes whispered sternly to him to have greater care of silence. He halted with his master while the vanguard passed. He saw first of all Sandoval, then Diego de Ordaz, Francisco de Lujo, and twenty other cavaliers and about three hundred foot soldiers. Then Cortes, and the centre, which he commanded in person, fell in line, and with this went also the baggage, part of the treasure destined for Emperor Charles, a portion of the artillery, and the Aztec princes. The rearguard was entrusted by Pedro de Alvarado and Velasquez de Leon. The Tlascalan allies were mixed in amongst these three groups.

Xicotencatl, who had pondered long on Guatemozin's ad-

vice, determined to leave the Spaniards as soon as they were out of the city, and to hasten to Tlascala, where he would try to arouse his countrymen to the danger of their friendship for the Teules.

As they went unopposed, Cortes wondered if it were possible that they were to get out of Tenochtitlan thus easily. He knew the Aztecs rarely attacked at night, and perhaps they might be thinking the Spaniards were too wearied that day to attempt to depart. There was still no sign that they had been observed. A mistlike rain was falling and the only lights in the city were the fires burning on the summits of the teocallis.

Fernando too was wondering whether there would not be some short, sharp fighting before they could leave the city behind, but his confidence in Cortes's ability to bring them through danger to safety had been unshaken even by their late disasters. "Keep your ears open, Fernando," whispered Cortes. "A single word, which you could comprehend, heard in time might tell us whether this darkness has many ears."

At last they could distinguish ahead of them the beginning of the causeway and the dark hole where the drawbridge had been. Magarino and his men hurried forward with their bridge to span the opening.

"God be praised! we are out of the city safely," exclaimed de Ordaz.

"But what is that?" cried Sandoval. "See, yonder the men running! Sentinels! Aztec sentinels! They go to give the alarm. Stop them, stop them!"

But in the dark the Aztecs evaded the soldiers sent in pur-

suit, and in a few minutes the priests on the lookouts of the teocallis had communicated to each other.

"The drum, the drum, Captain!" exclaimed Fernando. "When that calls the whole city springs to arms. There is not a second now to lose."

Tenochtitlan was indeed awake: torches like myriads of fireflies danced through the streets, and the roar from the angry Indians was louder than from a hundred menageries.

The bridge held, and Sandoval, on his good steed Motilla, and all the vanguard dashed across it in safety; then the baggage and the men of the centre were ready to advance over it. Just as Cortes was giving the word, a hail of arrows and stones fell upon them. It came from the lake itself, and the war cries and the sounds of boat hitting against boat told the Spaniards whence they were being attacked. The missiles fell faster and faster, and the Spaniards pressed on, wasting no time to fire at their foe in the darkness. The rearguard was now crossing the bridge when Sandoval sent a cavalier spurring back to bid Magarino bring the bridge to the front, as there was another opening ahead. But when the soldiers attempted to take up the bridge it could not be moved; not all their strength could loosen it.

This news was brought to Cortes, and soon all knew that before them was an unspanned hole and the enemy closing behind and on all sides of them.

"Fernando," Cortes called, "cry out to the Tlascalans and bid them halt." Fernando dashed back and forth, calling out in Aztec. Mingled with the cries of the Spaniards he heard the voices of some of the Indian allies, lamenting that they were

lost, that Huitzilopotchli was taking vengeance on the invaders of his land, that it was useless to try to escape that night death which threatened by weapons and by water. Fernando wished that he were not obliged to understand more of their spoken forebodings than the rest of his companions, and he was glad to return once again to Cortes's side, where he could feel his inspiring courage.

But Cortes's orders to the Spaniards were also in vain; discipline was lost in this nightmare of death back and front and surrounding them, in this darkness of a narrow way, with the dark waters of the lake on either side. The baggage and guns were pushed forward by the struggling men and fell into the water at the break in the causeway. Soldiers and horses fell on top of these, and Aztecs climbing up on both sides from their canoes grabbed many a man down to death.

It was like the old pictures of the Inferno, Fernando thought, painted on the wall of the church at home in Spain, which he had often gazed at during long dull sermons—demons were dragging souls and bodies away to torment while balls of fire rained down upon the damned. He had lost all hope that any of them would ever escape; yet he went on fighting, almost mechanically shielding himself and his horse from Aztec weapons.

At last Cortes saw that the debris had almost filled up the opening in the shallow water of the canal, and he sprang towards it.

"Forward!" he cried, his voice ringing out with new hope, "forward! we can ford it now." But few heard him in the dreadful clamour.

Fernando rode close behind him, and as Cortes urged his horse into the water he followed, and after him several cavaliers. So swimming and struggling, they at last reached the other side and clambered up.

"Hither, men! hither!" called Cortes; "you can cross now."

Most of the horsemen succeeded in crossing, but many a foot-soldier lost his footing and was swept out into the lake, to drown or to be pulled into a canoe and reserved for a worse fate.

"God be praised, I weighted myself not down with gold," said Diaz as he, himself in safety, reached out a helping hand to several comrades. "Did you see Juan and Pedro yonder borne down by the weight of the treasure in their belts?"

Cortes and those fortunate cavaliers who had crossed now hastened forward to see if the way were clear ahead. Soon they caught up with Sandoval and the vanguard, and beheld with dismay a third dark gap yawning before them in the causeway.

"Let us not linger, gentlemen," called Cortes. "Needs must when the devil drives. Follow me."

He forced El Romo into the water and half swimming, half walking, the beast gained the other side.

"Foot-soldiers, hold on to the horses," commanded Cortes. And by doing this many got safely over, but others suffered the same fate as their comrades at the second crossing.

It was almost dawn. The faint light showed the lake covered with canoes, from every one of which rained arrows and stones. So close together were the boats that the surface of the water was hidden by them.

"Master," cried Fernando, "I hear the Tlascalans yonder

calling out that Alvarado and the rearguard are being overwhelmed and must perish speedily unless help comes to them at once."

Cortes did not wait to consider but cried:

"St. James to the rescue! Alvarado is in dire peril."

And then the cavaliers, still breathless from their own escape, turned back to face once more the dangers in order to save their comrades. They swam again to the other side of the causeway and dashed back to the second opening.

"Courage, Alvarado," called out Cortes.

The rearguard was pressed closely on all sides, from the lake and behind by the hosts of the city. The guns cleared a path every now and then, but it closed as water closes behind a boat's keel that has divided it. Cortes saw that Alvarado's horse had been slain and that he was standing in the midst of terror-stricken soldiers, trying to urge them forward across the gulf. The cavaliers dashed towards the enemy and made a temporary space; but again the Indian hosts came on and there was nothing to be done but to get out of the death tangle as quickly as might be. Men knew that there was no hope of checking the assailants, so they chose the terrors ahead of them. And cavaliers and foot-soldiers swam and scrambled as best they could across the gap, many here again being swept away in the lake.

Cortes and the cavaliers believed that Alvarado had come across with them, but to their horror, they beheld him still on the other side.

"Swim!" commanded Cortes in tones that testified to his great anxiety that it was too late, and the war canoes now pressed into the gap, rendering this impossible.

Death faced Alvarado on every side. Then he stooped and picked up his long lance, which had fallen.

"Ye saints! What is it he thinks of doing?" cried Sandoval.

And while Christians and Aztecs looked on in wonder, Alvarado planted his lance firmly in the debris which choked the shallow gap, and with one almost superhuman effort, he swung himself across the wide opening to the other side.

A cry of applause rang out from friend and foe, the Aztecs crying: "That is truly Tonatiuh, Child of the Sun."

And to this day their descendants show the spot where Alvarado made his wonderful leap.

There was now no one left on the city side save the heaps of dead and the prisoners whom the Aztecs were bearing back with them, so Cortes rallied the remnant of his army and urged it forward till the fatal causeway was left behind. They reached the village of Popotla, and Cortes, dismounting, sank wearily upon the steps of a temple, beneath the branches of a giant cypress tree, and counted those who remained of the army which had left the palace of Axayacatl a few hours before. Fernando, bleeding from a wound on his forehead and dripping with lake water, sat at Cortes's feet.

The soldiers slouched by; not one but had escaped such perils, the telling of which in years to come by wintry firesides would raise the gooseflesh of their listeners; even the cavaliers walked, for their horses were either dead or too exhausted to bear them.

"And their muskets!" groaned Cortes; "not a barrel to be seen."

"Gone, too, the Emperor's treasure," sighed Fernando, who

had been fascinated by the sight of all the gold and precious stones.

"What is that to me?" exclaimed Cortes, angrily; "what pearl is worth the lives of my men? See, yon is Sandoval, my Gonzalvo, praise be God, and de Avila, though severely wounded, I judge. And de Olid, what marvels he has wrought this *noche triste* (sad night) and Ordaz. Did you see him pull an Aztec right out of his canoe? Oh! never had a commander such officers and men as I had, and where, oh where have I led them?"

Fernando realized that his master was not talking to him, that his overburdened heart was only finding a necessary outlet in words.

"Ho! there," called out Cortes as another limping, dripping little troop went by, "where is Velasquez de Leon, your commander?"

"Dead, Señor," a soldier answered, curtly, not even turning his head to Cortes as he spoke.

"Gone?" exclaimed Cortes, "gone, that loyal spirit, who served me so well as almost to make me forgive his hated kinsman?"

He continued to demand news of many others, only to receive similar answers. Nine hundred of his soldiers had been slain, as Bernal Diaz counted, and twelve hundred of their Indian allies. It was with joy that he beheld Martin Lopez, his shipwright, on whose skill he knew their future welfare depended so greatly.

The men had no eyes for Cortes, no complaints or demands. All they thought of was to reach some spot where they might rest in safety. Their very silence, however, affected Cortes

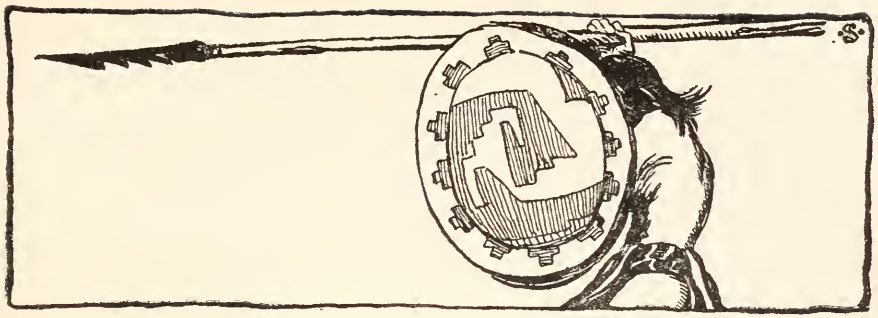
poignantly. His sadness as he beheld their thinned ranks increased each moment, until at last he leaned his head in his hands and wept.

When he lifted his head it was to ask Fernando:

"Marina, where is she; do you know what has befallen her?"

"Aye, Señor," answered the boy, proudly, "she is safe. She passed a moment ago. It was my good fortune that I came up in time to cut the arm of an Aztec who would have slain her. They slew, perhaps not knowing in the darkness who they were, the children of Montezuma, all but one, the Princess Tecuichpo. She was carried off by a Cacique whose face I could not see, but I would wager that it was Ahuitzotl. Doubtless she is safe now with her husband, Prince Guatemozin."

Cortes now roused himself. The past he could not change, but even now he began to look to the future, and the present he must control. Mounting El Romo, he led the army through the village of Tlacopan to the more open country beyond, to a hill on which was a teocalli. He urged the men, who at first refused, to one more effort, to drive off the few Aztecs who held the temple. And soon they were able to throw themselves down to enjoy in peace the rest of exhaustion.



CHAPTER XXI

The Battle of Otumba

"FATHER," said Cortes to Olmedo, the seventh day following their evacuation of Tenochtitlan, "I feel like Moses leading the Israelites through the desert. I would though that I might see manna and quails drop down from the heavens. This diet of wild cherries is not fit for human stomachs."

"Perchance," suggested the priest, "we shall soon have another horse to eat."

" 'Tis better to have a beast carry a man's flesh than that a man should carry a beast's flesh inside of him," commented Cortes as his eyes examined the horse whose drooping head showed that its road was near its end. "Yet the wounded, in spite of all their privations, have improved," he continued, "and once we reach Tlascala, 'the Land of Bread,' we shall be treated as if it were Castile itself and may feed without stint."

Since the night when Cortes had wept none had beheld in him any sign of weakness. He praised the bravery of the survivors and told them that they must face starvation with

the same courage with which they had faced the Aztec hosts. He reminded them of the hospitality of the Tlascalans awaiting them, and promised that in the letter he was to write the Emperor he would give praise to all of them and would especially commend the deeds of numerous individuals. If he himself looked ahead with uncertain gaze no one knew it, nor was anyone aware of the moment when out of the deep reservoirs of strength there had flowed to him new courage and the determination to win back all he had lost. For the time being he allowed everyone to think he meant to push on to Vera Cruz after a short halt at Tlascala.

All through the days the Spaniards were journeying by a roundabout way towards that city small bodies of Aztec soldiers harried them with their arrows, and Cortes was well aware that they would never be allowed to reach the Republic without a battle.

On that morning, a week after their exit from Tenochtitlan, they saw the valley of Otumba stretching before them. "See!" exclaimed the homesick but uncomplaining Tlascalans, "yonder rise the hills of our country. A little farther and we are safe."

Even as they spoke the advance guard hurried back to report that the valley was filled with an Aztec army. Cortes rode ahead and looked down upon the multitude below. It seemed to his fancy that for every Aztec the Spaniards had slain since their entry into Anahuac a thousand were there waiting to oppose them. He looked back at his own handful of troops: no artillery, no muskets, and only twenty horses. Yet he did not hesitate. He galloped back, called a halt and

mounting a rock so that his voice could carry to all of the men, said:

"Spaniards! The heathen are encamped before us. We must conquer if we would pass. You know that we can not go back. We are wounded, weary, and thin are our ranks, yet we bear with us a treasure greater than that which was lost on the causeway—the spirit of Spanish heroes, of our ancestors who have fought heathen for centuries. What are numbers as arrayed against that? And forget not, that with us fight heavenly allies."

There was no need of a longer speech. Cortes drew up the troops in the most effective formation and ordered the advance. Every man fought as if he were the captain of a company, and, as one of them said afterwards, "the little groups were as islets against which the breakers, roaring and surging, spent their fury in vain."

Yet the numbers of the Aztecs told after a time, in spite of the almost miraculous feats of Cortes's army. Sandoval in particular would dash into the ranks of the foe, slashing all about him, then turning Motilla around, would gallop back to the Spanish lines.

Fernando found it difficult to keep up with Cortes. His own horse, which had been severely wounded during the Terrible Night, now quivered with nervousness at the sounds and sights of the battle and endeavored to swing around and dash away from the mass of sharp weapons all about him.

"Hold, coward!" yelled Fernando as he pulled on the reins with all his strength: "would you disgrace your blood and mine?"

But the poor animal's terror had indeed been a foreboding of his fate. A Cacique had noticed how often Malinche's page had warded blows from his master and knew that by killing him he would be that much nearer to destroying Cortes. Fernando saw his danger and attempted to swerve his horse quickly to the left while he slashed with his sword to the right; but the panicstricken steed only reared up in the air and the murderous maquahuitl gashed through his chest. Fernando slipped from the saddle as the beast fell, and the body between him and his foe protected him for a moment while he got to his feet. Before the Aztec's weapon could reach him he had cut down the arm which wielded it, and with a second blow the horse was avenged.

But while he was thus defending himself, Cortes had been wounded. When Fernando, after dodging between horses' legs, finally reached him, he found his master bleeding and white. But he could not persuade him to go to the rear. Cortes saw that his army was doomed unless something like a miracle should take place speedily.

Suddenly he caught sight of Cihuaca, the Indian leader, in his gorgeous war trappings.

"Follow and support me!" cried Cortes; "yonder is our mark." And spurring his horse, he dashed towards the uplifted golden net, the insignia of the leader. After him spurred Sandoval, de Olid and Alvarado, and other cavaliers, till they reached their goal through the rows of Aztecs whose utmost efforts were unequal to stopping the horsemen. Cortes's javelin, like the prow of a ship riding the waves, stuck out before him, and with all his force he ran it through

the body of the Cacique Cihuaca. One of the cavaliers sprang from his horse and gave the deathblow with his sword, and catching the golden net on the bloody point, handed it to Cortes, who waved it above his head that all might see.

The death of their leader was a serious and unexpected blow to the Aztecs. Those about him sought to flee, and their terror soon communicated itself to the ranks behind. Cortes took advantage of this moment to urge his troops to renewed efforts. Almost blinded with blood and sweat—for the day was very hot—the Spaniards fought with desperation, and at last the tide turned.

"Lo! Behold! Yonder rides St. James, our patron saint!" cried out a soldier wildly, pointing. "He is mounted on a white steed. See ye not? Yonder! Yonder! Follow him and victory is ours."

And when victory had indeed been won and the Aztecs pursued until their victors were wearied, men lying upon the booty they had gathered, told how they had seen before them, ever in the thickest part of the struggle the figure of the Saint.

Now before them lay a clear road to Tlascala, and though there were few without wounds, the Spaniards marched onward with heads raised, and occasionally a song burst from their lips or a laugh of triumph as a soldier arrayed himself in plumed helmet of a Cacique he had slain.

If Cortes had had any doubt as to the reception he would receive from the Tlascalans when he returned after the failure to hold Montezuma's capital, they vanished as soon as he had crossed the border of the Republic. Maxixca, one of the four

ruling Caciques, met them and greeted Cortes as one might greet his brother.

"We have made common cause together," he said, "and we have now common injuries to avenge. Come weal or woe, be assured that Tlascalans will prove your loyal friends and stand by the white men to the death."

After a few days' rest and an abundance of good food the army was ready to march on to the City of Tlascala. Here they were received with the utmost kindness, and Cortes had no fear for the immediate present except for the effects of his own wounds. The surgeon found it necessary to cut off two fingers from his left hand. Fernando and Marina attended him carefully during his illness, in great anxiety at times lest his fever should never leave him.

When he arose again another trouble awaited him. Many of the men, in particular those who had come to him from the ranks of the conquered de Narvaez at Vera Cruz, insisted that he should lose no further time in starting for the coast. Again Cortes had to use all his persuasive powers, so often tested, to call to his aid both love of adventure and love of gain, before he could make them consent to his plan for seeking once more their fortunes in Mexico.

And while these plans were maturing Cortes was glad to keep his men in good condition by campaigns against some of the tribes which warred upon the Tlascalans, and by attacking successfully certain cities garrisoned by Aztecs.

Fernando took pleasure in seeing once more the friends he had made during his first stay in Tlascala. Owing to his experience at Montezuma's court, he was now more familiar with

Indian life than any other of the Spaniards. He would sit among the venders in the market-place listening to the tales they told of wild beasts in the dense forests, legends of the gods, and the heroic deeds of their ancestors. The youths of his own age, sons of various Caciques, listened to him in wonder as he related his extraordinary adventures in Cholula and Tenochtitlan, of his narrow escapes from death on the teocalli and during the "Terrible Night," and his accounts of the splendour of Montezuma's household.

His experience of Indian ways and his intimate knowledge of their language were of the greatest help to Cortes in cementing friendship with his allies, and his punctilious manner and use of their own customs pleased the Tlascalans. Though Marina was still Cortes's official interpreter, there were many times when Fernando could carry informal messages back and forth.

But he was not successful in seeing much of Xicotencatl. He had been proud when the young Tlascalan had sought him out during their march to Tenochtitlan, and was grateful to him for saving his life in Cholula. But now he thought that Xicotencatl avoided him, and that when chance threw them together the Cacique talked no longer freely with him as he had done in the past.

And he was right. Xicotencatl's mind dwelt continually upon the warning of Guatemozin. He saw so clearly that it seemed to him all his countrymen must be blind that they could not see that the Teules were to be the ruin of his beloved Tlascala. He could not sleep for thinking of it; he climbed alone to the heights of the mountains where he had so

often hunted, and sleeping under the stars, he prayed the gods to give his tongue such eloquence that his countrymen must listen to the truth and be warned in time. He alone of Tlascalan nobles took no part in the feastings to the Spaniards.

A hunter who brought him food during one of his mountain vigils told him the strange news he had heard in the village below—that an embassy from the new Aztec king was on its way to Tlascala to lay presents at the feet of the four Rulers of the Republic and to deliver a message. The unheard-of step on the part of the Aztecs brought Xicotencatl hurrying down to the city to see what it might mean.

When he reached Tlascala he went direct to the great council hall, where he found the four Caciques who had just given audience to the Aztec envoys from Cuitlahuac, the brother of Montezuma. The hall was filled with the hastily summoned chiefs of the Republic. There were no Spaniards present, for the Tlascalans had not invited them and, curious though Cortes might be, he would not offend his allies by any sign of suspicion.

The envoys had delivered their gifts and were speaking as Xicotencatl entered. They told how the new king, greatly as he revered his brother's memory, had decided upon a vastly different policy. He sought to make friends, not with the Teules, but with his neighbours, whose bronze color and language proclaimed them descended from the same distant ancestors. He regretted, they said, that there had been enmity so long between the two countries who should live in peace together, and he besought the Tlascalans to take warning at the harm the Spaniards had wrought in Anahuac, "Doubt not,"

the speaker said in the words his royal master had put into his mouth, "that they will serve Tlascala likewise. Join with us, and we shall sweep these interlopers into the sea."

Every argument of the Aztecs had echoed in Xicotencatl's heart. Forgetting the deference which should have kept him silent until his elders had spoken, he pushed to the front rank and stood before his father, the ancient Xicotencatl, and the three other leaders, and cried:

"The gods speak through the lips of the Aztecs the same message which they have whispered to me who sought their guidance in solitude on the high mountains. The time is past when Tlascalans and Aztecs should combat each other. We are like two men in a canoe who, when the storm comes, must not pull in different ways. The Teules—that is the storm which has destroyed palaces and huts along the streets of Tenochtitlan and which will yet break down the tall grain in the Land of Bread. I who have fought the Aztecs know their valour, and I counsel you, Rulers of Tlascala, that you harken to their message and unite with them to drive forth the white men."

Xicotencatl's words had convinced some of the younger Caciques, but the older ones shook their heads. His own father declared that he had sworn friendship to the Spaniards and he would not break his oath. Maxixca, one of the Four, then rose and spoke:

"Will you listen to fair words from false foes? Do you think that if we help them drive the Teules away our ancient enemy will not turn then against us? Can Aztec gifts of cotton and of salt *buy* our friendship? Shall we who have shed

the blood of our young warriors by the side of the Spaniards and welcomed them to our city, turn now against them? Would not the gods who punish a breach of hospitality wreak vengeance on us? Moreover, have not the gods themselves sent these guests, according to the ancient prophecy?"

Xicotencatl was tense with eagerness during this speech. Never before in his life had he felt such a certainty as now that if he could not prevail upon the council to break the alliance with the Spaniards and to join the Aztecs in driving them from the country, his land would perish. He had no thought of self nor of winning fame in battle; it was pure patriotism which impelled him.

"I have heard what the wise Maxixca has spoken," he said, "But he has listened so much to the tongues of Malinche and his priest that he can not hear the voices that warn our land of disaster. These I hear in every wind, in every rustle of the maize, in our streams as they flow from the snows, in the cries of the eagles on the rocky summits. The bear can not mate with the deer, nor the rabbit with the wildcat, no more may red men and white men live side by side. Oh, harken to my words, Fathers of the Republic, and say not that because Xicotencatl is young he has no truth on his lips!"

The ancient Xicotencatl had listened to his son's plea, his sightless eyes turned ever on him. Now he rose and the council waited in awe for the words from their venerable leader. But he did not speak. Instead he walked with slow but unerring steps to the spot where his son was standing. Placing his withered hand on his shoulder, he shoved him with more

force that one would have believed him still to possess towards the doorway.

"Go!" he cried, "go and presume not to speak foolish words in the presence of wise men."

Xicotencatl, stunned by this unexpected treatment, walked rapidly away from the hall and then with slow steps out to his own home beyond the city. When he had climbed the hill top he looked back at the city below and lifted up his arms to the heavens with a gesture of despair.

"Tlascala! Tlascala!" he cried aloud.

He spent most of his time away from the city in solitude, hunting or in drilling the retainers of his family. He heard of the death of Maxixca and learned that the Cacique, who had always been a friend and advocate of the Spaniard, had embraced the religion of the white man on his deathbed. Xicotencatl wondered how much longer the gods would wait before taking vengeance upon the country which allowed them to be thus defied.

This was the first conversion among the Tlascalans, and Father Olmedo's heart was lifted up even as Xicotencatl's was borne down. Maxixca's act, he prayed, would lead many to follow his example, and when the ancient Xicotencatl declared that he too wished to worship the God of the Teules, he knew that his prayer had been heard.

Cortes had now recovered from his wounds and his mind was already working out plans for besieging Tenochtitlan. He was resting one hot noon under the stone arches of a palace, looking out on a courtyard filled with prickly pear-trees

and trees of liquid amber. Sandoval and Alvarado were stretched out on grass mats near him.

"Are you become too proud, Fernando, since I made you a squire, to perform once more a page's duty and prepare some cool beverage for us? Have you forgotten how you used to make *chocolatl* for King Montezuma?"

Fernando soon returned with goblets containing the drink, and Cortes, now refreshed, began to talk of what was uppermost in his mind.

"How shall we succeed now, friends?" he questioned. "At least we have been taught our lesson well, no longer to believe that an easy task awaits us."

"Who would have thought," exclaimed Alvarado, "that the Aztecs could be so much more warlike than their sovereign."

"They made you jump, Pedro," joked Sandoval.

"Since we know what it would cost us to attempt to return by the way we came so sadly," continued Cortes, "we must think of another route; and since they are familiar with our tricks of guns and muskets now—and not many of them are left to us—let us surprise them with another proof of the white man's superiority. We were beaten on land; let us beat them on water. Go fetch me Martin Lopez, Fernando, that we may lose no more time."

The shipwright soon made his appearance, and the sight of his sturdy frame and arms made the officers feel that whatever he undertook must needs succeed.

"I know that you can build staunch craft, Martin," Cortes said when he had bade him sit down; "but the work I have for you may be beyond your power."

"Not if it be a hull and sails, Señor," answered Martin proudly.

"Listen," Cortes continued. "You shall build me in Tlascala, where there is an abundance of wood and pitch, thirteen brigantines. Sails, cordage and all needful shall be brought from Vera Cruz where you remember I had them stored when the ships were burned. But this is not enough. You must build these ships and then break them up in pieces that they may be carried on men's shoulders to Lake Tezcuco. Is this task beyond you?"

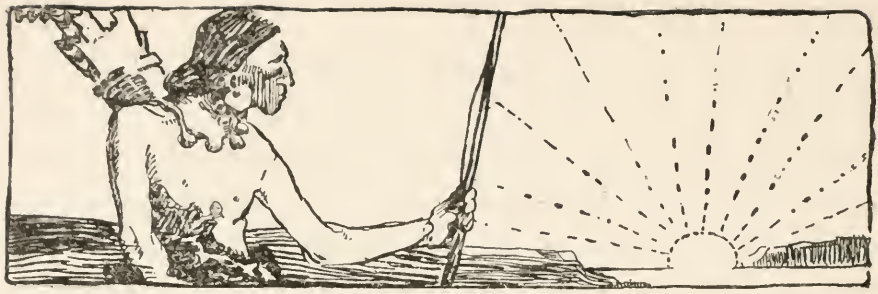
"Have no fear, Señor," Martin answered, "the ships shall be none the less good for swimming because they traverse mountains. They shall be like frogs, suited to land or water."

The two lieutenants were struck with astonishment.

"You have in truth conceived a bold idea," exclaimed Alvarado. "The lake that was near our undoing shall now be our ally."

"Go with Martin," Cortes commanded Fernando, "and ask of the Caciques permission to take all the men necessary into the forest to cut the wood. It saves me much trouble and delay," Cortes said, turning to Sandoval, "that this lad speaks so easily the Indian tongue."

And Xicotencatl, hunting in the forest, heard the sound of axes and beheld through the leaves a band of Teules cutting down many trees. He caught sight too of Fernando, but moved softly away before the boy to whom he had so often given proofs of kindly interest, could know that he was there.



CHAPTER XXII

Xicotencatl Meets His Fate

PRINCESS TECUICHPO was alone with her husband Prince Guatemozin in his palace, which was not far from the royal palace that Montezuma had occupied before the coming of the Teules. He had just returned from a hunting trip in the forests. Not only did he love this sport but he was confident that the exertions it required kept his body supple for the war that soon must be waged. Tecuichpo had been weaving a rug of fine cottons, which she laid aside to embrace him when he entered fresh and cool from his bath.

"And so the news reached you even in the thick of the forest?" she queried.

"Yes," he replied, "that our uncle is no more. It was a short time indeed that he wore the crown of Anahuac. He fought manfully for the land, therefore his spirit has flown at once to the blessed realm where the gods abide, and his name will be written forever in our hearts."

"Who, do you think, will be the next king?" She would not say the thought that was in her mind, even though her instinct told her that her husband too was thinking it.

"I do not know, Little One," he answered, seating himself on a stool beside her. The terrible days in which they lived could not kill altogether the joy of living, and it was very sweet to rest thus near his young wife and to look into her dark eyes. "The council will choose," he continued. "Even as I came into the city I met the electors hurrying towards the teocalli. We shall know soon; the gods grant that it may be a strong man who, like the eagle of our banners, can throttle the snake which has crawled into our land."

"And if it were you, Guatemozin, what would you do?" She could no longer keep her thought unspoken.

"If it were I," answered the young Cacique, his eyes flashing, "I would remember our ancestors and how they won this land, and, the gods helping me, I would win it back again till not one of those pale-faced invaders was left to set foot on its soil."

They were interrupted by a slave parting the curtains to announce that a priest had come on urgent business. When he had been admitted and made the obeisance due to those of royal birth, he said:

"I have come, Prince Guatemozin, by order of the High Priest. He has sent word to all the Caciques of royal blood, asking them to appear before the council. It has already debated the matter of choosing Anahuac's new King. Now the High Priest awaits the coming of you and of your kinsmen before praying the gods to give their decision."

Guatemozin rose and preceded the priest from the apartment and the palace. Tecuichpo, left alone, was restless with waiting and eagerness. "Oh, Maztla, my dear bird Maztla,"

she cried aloud, "I would you were still alive to help the minutes pass."

Guatemozin found the royal Princes, the chief Caciques of the kingdom and the principal priests already assembled on the summit of the Great Teocalli. The High Priest began his invocation of the god:

"Oh Lord, thou knowest that the days of our sovereign are at an end, for thou hast placed him beneath thy feet. He abides in the place of his retreat; he has trodden the path which we are all to tread; he has gone to the house whither we are all to follow—the house of eternal darkness, where no light cometh. He is gathered to his rest, and no one henceforth shall disquiet him. All the princes, his predecessors, who sat on the imperial throne, directing the affairs of thy kingdom,—for thou art the universal lord and emperor,—they laid down the intolerable burden of government, and left it to him, their successor. Yet he sojourned but a few days in his kingdom —but a few days had we enjoyed his presence, when thou summonedst him away to follow those who had ruled over the land before him. And great cause has he for thankfulness, that thou hast relieved him from so grievous a load, and placed him in tranquillity and rest.

"Who now shall order matters for the good of the people and the realm? Who shall appoint the judges to administer justice to thy people? Who now shall bid the drum and the flute to sound, and gather together the veteran soldiers and the men mighty in battle? Our Lord and our Defence! wilt thou in thy wisdom, elect one who shall be worthy to sit on the throne of thy kingdom; one who shall bear the grievous

burden of government; who shall comfort and cherish thy poor people, even as the mother cherisheth her offspring? Oh Lord, most merciful, pour forth thy light and thy splendour over this thine empire. Order it so that thou shalt be served in all, and through all."

When the prayer was ended, the electors withdrew to an inner apartment while those left to await their decision walked restlessly about. Guatemozin did not join any of the groups but stood alone, looking off at the valley and the distant mountains, thinking deep thoughts of how beautiful a country it would be the duty of the new sovereign to protect.

In a few moments the electors returned, and the High Priest in a loud voice announced that the gods had chosen a new King and Emperor—the nephew of both Montezuma and Cuitlahua, a warrior proved in battle and wise in statecraft—Guatemozin.

When they had robed him in the royal garments and put on his head the crown with its sweeping green feathers, drumbeats and other music announced to the impatient people that their new Emperor was about to be conducted in state to the royal palace. The houses poured their inmates into the streets, and everywhere Guatemozin was received with shouts of rejoicing and flowers were strewn before his feet as he advanced. Yet there was lacking the careless laughter and the dancing processions of earlier days; men knew that their new monarch, the choice of their hearts as of their gods, had a grave task ahead of him. They felt confidence in him, but they could not forget the dangers which surrounded them.

Tecuichpo heard the shouts without, and soon her household

brought the news to her. Then shortly after came ladies of the court, bringing with them robes and scarves and jewels fit for the Emperor's wife. They clothed her in them and conducted her to the palace where Guatemozin was installed in the apartments which Montezuma had occupied.

Before the day was over Guatemozin had summoned the principal Caciques of the kingdom and told them of the plans he had thought out for resisting the new attack he felt confident the Spaniards would soon make. He gave orders to strengthen the causeways, to build more war canoes, to prepare arrows and javelins until they should be as plentiful as drops of rain in a summer shower. He told them that they must fight the Teules wherever they could find them, and that every prisoner was to be brought to Tenochtitlan to be sacrificed, so that the gods in gratitude would be pleased to give their aid to their faithful worshipers.

The next morning the new Emperor sent for Ahuitzotl.

"The hour for which I trained you is indeed come, son of Cacama," he said, "and for which you have trained yourself, though all unknowing what the need should be. The gods be thanked that you are strong as the ocelot you killed and wily as the fox. You are still young in years, but I am not so old myself as to have forgot what a taut bowstring is youth. It is well also that you have had opportunity to learn many of the white man's ways."

"In what do you command me, oh King?" asked Ahuitzotl, saluting.

"That you should be the very shadow of the Teules, and like a shadow, sometimes go before and sometimes after; that

you should inform me when they move, or even when they *think* of moving. Establish beacon posts on the mountains to flash to Tenochtitlan whatever news you have to tell me. Command what forces you will, and when it seems wise to you to hold up small numbers of the foe, stand and fight; or go alone where you may spy unseen. Is it too much I ask of you, Ahuitzotl?" he questioned, looking anxiously into the boy's face as if to read whether he were in truth equal to the task he had set him.

"It is not too much, oh Chosen of the Gods," answered the boy proudly.

"Then go," commanded Guatemozin, "and take this signet with you. I shall not ask in which direction you will set your face, only let it not be long before I have news of you."

Ahuitzotl went to his father's house and clothed himself in the garb of a farmer and set off towards the Tlascalan boundary by the same route he had journeyed when sent by Montezuma. On the way he organized a system of communications by means of beacon fires and by swift runners who should wait at various posts to carry messages forward. It was not difficult for him to travel unquestioned through the country; he knew the ways and had caught many tricks of Tlascalan speech.

When he reached the city of Tlascala he mingled with the crowd which had come out to observe the great army ready to set forth against Anahuac. That night he sent a message to Guatemozin that, "Malinche has now more men under his banners than before. I counted six hundred Teules armed with bows, swords and pikes, forty horses and nine of their

big guns. But greater far was the host of Tlascalans, the ancient enemies of our fathers. I know not how many thousands there are, for while I was counting a talkative merchant made me answer him and I would not appear to be numbering them. But there are warriors of Cholula, Tepeaca and other cities which have rebelled against you. The four chief Caciques of the Republic marched too with all their banners and followed by their own retainers. I beheld the younger Xicotencatl, whose knit brows, like marks on picture-writing, showed that his heart moved not with his feet. You have already heard how his voice was raised against the Teules in the council. This message I send you now and I will inform you shortly of other things. I touch the earth with my hand and bow before the greatness of your power, oh King."

Like the shadow he had been commanded to copy, Ahuitzotl followed the Spaniards. He was near them as they set forth from Tlascala, where for the present the allies were to remain; and when they crossed the mountain ridge that separated the two countries he was near enough to see the Spaniards as they huddled at night around the great fires they built to keep off the severe cold. He saw that they were bent towards the city of Tezcuco, the city in which until shortly before a great king had reigned. Ahuitzotl knew that Cortes had set up a new young king, in order that through him he might rule the land.

Ahuitzotl sent another message to Guatemozin, saying:

"The Teules will rest at Tezcuco for a time, and because it lies near enough to Tlascala for troops to pass back and forth. The young King has forsaken the gods of his fathers

and worships those of the white men. With him night and day abides Fernando, whom you know, who teaches him the tongue of the Teules and who has orders, if it be needful, to hold the King by force. You have bidden me tell you what Malinche *thinketh* of doing. I have watched him send forth warriors towards many directions, and I believe that he plans this: to circle round about Tenochtitlan and to take first one city and then another, and thus cut off your capital till it falls into his hands. But you will prevent him, oh King, by your cunning and by your bravery. Send, Lord, if you will listen to the word of your servant Ahuitzotl, many warriors first to Iztapalapan."

Guatemozin did not fail to do this, and there was a sharp encounter between Aztecs and Spaniards there. At last the Spaniards were victorious, but the night after they had taken the city and looted it and set fire to its houses, they heard the sound of water, and discovered that the dike had been cut. It was Ahuitzotl who with canoes full of men had worked to cut off the Spaniards thus. Cortes, seeing the danger that they would indeed be surrounded by water, was forced to leave the city and the plunder, thankful to escape without further loss.

Though they lost thus the fruits of their victory, Cortes was not dismayed. In spite of the fierce fighting of the Aztecs, he succeeded in taking one city after another, drawing the ring close about Tenochtitlan. Some of these cities defended themselves to the last; of others the Caciques and inhabitants, who had been oppressed by the tax gathers in the time of Montezuma, were willing now to throw off allegiance to his suc-

cessor and to acknowledge the Emperor across seas, in whose name Malinche warred.

Ahuitzotl was in many of these encounters. Fernando recognized more than once on a banner the Fish which was his arms. Each avoided coming in contact with the other and each felt a kind of pride in the other's prowess, for Fernando too, though he had not such authority as the Aztec, proved himself every day a brave and untiring fighter.

Cortes knew that there was still a long way to go before he could hope for final victory; but he never wearied. Yet he was willing if possible to avoid spilling more blood. It might be, he thought, that the new King would be content to make peace. So he sent some Aztec prisoners back with his message, that if Tenochtitlan would again acknowledge as its overlord the Spanish Emperor, he, Cortes, would fight no more against it, and Guatemozin should reign still over his people.

"Does he think that I have the heart of a rabbit?" cried Guatemozin angrily when he had listened to the message. "Let Malinche wait until he grows old for an answer, or until my own arrow pierces his brow."

But Cortes in his heart cared little what the Aztec King thought. He had now in readiness what he called "the key of victory." The brigantines were finished, and he had sent Sandoval to transport them from Tlascala across the mountains to Tezcuco. The timbers which had been shaped by Martin Lopez were borne on the backs of Indian porters and covered with sweet smelling boughs and brilliant flowers which the inhabitants of Tlascala had laid on them. Over the moun-

tains was the strange voyage of this little fleet—"a flock of ducks," as Bernal Diaz called them, "impatient for the water."

Cortes made ready to go to meet it as a bridegroom prepares for the bride. All the cavaliers dressed themselves in gala array, and the soldiers brightened up their travel-stained jerkins, and out on the road they marched, and at the first sight of Sandoval's guard up went caps and banners towards the blue sky and loud cries of "Castile and Tlascala!"

Cortes turned to Alvarado and exclaimed enthusiastically:

"It is a marvellous thing, that few have seen or even heard of, this transportation of thirteen vessels of war on the shoulders of men for nearly twenty leagues across the mountains."

Then he gave orders to hasten the digging of the canal between the city and the lake.

In the months which followed Cortes won from the Aztecs many cities in the valley; yet Guatemozin could say with truth that all these conquests had cost the Teules dear, and that Tenochtitlan was still free from the noise of battle.

But when Cortes set siege to the city of Tacuba, near to the lake, and conquered it, Guatemozin became very silent, and prayed to the gods, for he realized that the ring was tightening and he knew that without help his own valour and the bravery of his subjects might be in vain. Other victories by the Spaniards had now resulted in a circle of posts all about Tenochtitlan. Now Cortes sent Fernando to Tlascala, to tell the Caciques of the Republic that the time had come for them to send the forces they held at his disposal. When they arrived, he said, he would begin the siege of the Aztec capital.

The Tlascalans rejoiced that the hour had come to put down their ancient foe, and fifty thousand of their finest warriors marched to Cortes at Tacuba.

Xicotencatl, who was ordered to command them, alone did not share the enthusiasm. His discipline of his troops was stricter than ever, and his words were fewer. Even when he reached the Spaniards his greetings were as short as courtesy would permit, and Fernando was troubled by the change he felt in him, and tried to gain his confidence.

"Tell me, Xicotencatl," he begged, "have I done aught which has caused you to consider me no longer worthy of your notice? Once you said that Fernando would be a great warrior some day. Am I less brave now than when you saved my life at Cholula?"

For once in many months did Xicotencatl show any sign of emotion. He gazed at Fernando as if he meant to say some affectionate words; then the sound of a Spanish trumpet seemed to change his thoughts; he clenched his hands as he answered:

"I would that I might call you and all your people cowards."

It was a day or two after this that a Tlascalan Cacique, a kinsman of Xicotencatl, had a quarrel with a Spanish soldier and was sent by Cortes back to his own land. Xicotencatl, who had been searching eagerly for some excuse to avoid fighting with the Spanish against the Aztecs, found it here. With no word to the Spaniards, he left the camp, taking with him a large body of troops who had always followed his fortunes and would do his bidding unquestioningly.

As soon as Cortes heard of his departure—not through Fer-

nando, who had seen the Tlascalan as he slipped away but could not bring himself to denounce him—he sent a party of Tlascalans after him to bid him return. When they came up with him they said:

"Is this indeed the son of our revered Xicotencatl, who deserts his post? *He* has ever been the friend of the white man, and will you not follow in his footsteps?"

"So much the worse," answered Xicotencatl, not deigning to stop to talk. "If he and my countrymen had taken my counsel, they would never have become the dupes of the perfidious strangers." Then he left the messengers staring after him as he strode on homewards.

"Xicotencatl has ever been the enemy of the Spaniards," cried Cortes when he had been told of this, "first in the field and since in the council chamber, openly or in secret, still the same, their implacable enemy."

Then he sent messengers to the rulers at Tlascala, telling them of Xicotencatl's act, and a body of horsemen to pursue and take him prisoner.

Xicotencatl heard the hoofs of the horses behind him just as he caught sight of his native city. He did not doubt that they had come for him. Though he could not outrun their speed, he had only to turn aside from the road and to dash into the thick forests until he had reached some mountain summit and no white man could ever find him. But he did not go. He thought to himself: "If the Teules take me prisoner, will not this insult to one of their rulers awaken my countrymen as nothing else would do, to the white men's intentions? If I let them take me shall I not thus be aiding Tlascala by

opening her eyes?" So he did not run. Yet when the Spaniards sought to lay hands on him his free blood boiled up within him and he struck out lustily with his maquahuitl. He wounded several, but the soldiers closed in on him and knocked his weapon from his hand.

Slowly they proceeded, captors and prisoner, towards the city whose very stones were dear to Xicotencatl. They encamped that night, a messenger going ahead to inform the Caciques of his capture. Xicotencatl lay alone, and a sadness which was not due to anxiety about his own fate kept him awake. He thought of the days when Tlascala was free and independent, when even the great Montezuma could not crush the little mountain state; now he felt it would have been better if the Aztecs had conquered them instead of the Teules, whom his father had welcomed. Would the gods too pass away, he wondered, if the Christian God alone was worshipped throughout the land? His own fate meant little to him now. Life had grown too bitter.

The next morning they entered Tlascala. The great square was filled with folk, silent and anxious. In the centre stood an object he had never seen there before—a gallows. Xicotencatl listened while a Tlascalan officer called out to the populace that Xicotencatl was guilty as judged by the laws of his own country and by the laws of their allies, the Spaniards —he had deserted his post in the face of the enemy. Xicotencatl made no effort to escape; he saw that he had been mistaken in believing that his countrymen would rise in anger against the Teules for judging him. Now his hope was a different one, that his death might arouse Tlascala to the fact

that she was no longer sole mistress in her boundaries. And yet even this hope was faint now; he knew that his country was erring not from weakness but from a mistaken belief in the value of the white man's friendship.

He looked towards the mountains he had loved and he remembered how when a youth his companions who climbed them with him had said that his eyes saw too far beyond their shorter vision. The gods had given him again the vision but had withheld it from his countrymen.

Then he mounted the scaffold.

CHAPTER XXIII

The Siege of Tenochtitlan

ALL was now ready for the actual siege of Tenochtitlan. Though the Spaniards had lost a number of men in preliminary campaigns, the loss had been more than made up by the unexpected arrival at Vera Cruz of a ship-load of their countrymen from Cuba, eager to share in the conquest, and by new Indian allies who flocked to Cortes's standard from various provinces which welcomed the chance of revolting against the rule under which they had long been oppressed. The army was now hardened by constant skirmishes and accustomed to the methods of Aztec warfare. Cortes himself had learned by experience that rash bravery could not carry him as far as steady persistency. He had several times barely escaped with his life when his hot head had led him into situations his own cooler judgment blamed him for entering.

Cortes called together his lieutenants and explained that he would attack the city from three different points.

"You, Alvarado," he commanded, "shall enter across the causeway from Tacuba where we suffered so on that Terrible

Night. You, de Olid, shall advance by the causeway from Cojohuacan, and Sandoval, you shall attack once more the city of Iztapalapan, and I with our brigantines will support you from the lake."

Fernando was eager to accompany Cortes and to experience this new form of lake warfare, but his master bade him go with Sandoval, as he would be of service to translate orders to the Indian allies.

Cortes's fleet was not allowed to proceed far without opposition. Thousands of war canoes shot out against it and rained a shower of arrows upon the brigantines.

"Hey, Martin!" cried Cortes to the shipwright who commanded the vessel which was the flagship; "we must give them a sharp blow at the very first that the brigantines may strike as wholesome a terror to their souls as did the first sight of our cavalry."

Not unlike a cavalry charge, in truth, was the rush of the brigantines on the smaller craft, striking them against each other and capsizing them; then their guns completed the victory. Guatemozin, when he heard the news, was resting for a spare moment in his palace. He sat and pondered long how he should find a way to combat these monsters of which Ahuitzotl had already warned him.

Cortes was jubilant at the effect of his new weapon.

"It is the key of war," he said of the fleet; "let us bring it nearer the lock."

He took up his own station at Xoloc, a sort of island in the lake where the different causeways crossed each other. He determined now to attempt an entrance into Tenochtitlan.

The attack was made from three sides. They advanced along the causeways until they were stopped by a wide breach, from the other side of which the Aztecs shot at them with such rapidity and precision that Cortes could not attempt to ford it. He sent word hurriedly that two brigantines should sail close in on either side and by their fire dislodge the defenders of the barricade. This was soon accomplished, and the breach was filled up, after which the Spaniards started their advance into the city.

Cortes was deeply moved.

"Behold the palace of Axayacatl," he cried, pointing to the well remembered walls; "forget not how we left it sadly and at night. Now, thanks to God and the saints, we are returning to it by daylight and rejoicing."

The veterans of the first entry into the city pointed out to the new troops the Great Teocalli, the palace of Montezuma, the market-place; but many a man who was boasting of his former feats and future deeds was suddenly felled to the ground by stones cast down on them from the azoteas.

"We will soon end that," cried Cortes. "Set fire to every house as we pass."

The Spaniards had no easy road before them. Serried ranks of Aztecs barred their passage, and only by means of the artillery were they able to cut their way through. They reached the great square, and before them loomed the Great Teocalli.

"Forward, men," Cortes urged. "The statues of Christ and of the Blessed Virgin we left on the summit await us."

But the men hesitated. The horror of this place, the mem-

ories of what they had suffered in their fight there, of their comrades hurled down from its terraces, of other comrades taken prisoners in their late skirmishes who had been sacrificed alive to the God of War—all these emotions halted them. Cortes slapped his horse's flanks in impatience and then spurred him forward, crying:

"St. James! St. James! Forward, and close up for Spain!" And like a cordial, the cry of Spain's chivalry went to the blood of all. They rushed forward, overwhelming the Aztecs, and then swarmed up the terraces to the summit.

"Where are the statues," they cried out, for they were nowhere to be seen, and in their places stood once more an idol of the frightful Huitzilopotchli. Mad with fury at what had happened to the Christian shrine which they had dedicated, they flung down the idol and threw after him some of the priests who tried to prevent them. The religious fervour of the Aztecs was no less than that of the Spaniards, and they made ready to punish the violators of their temple. They massed below about the foot of the walls and fell upon the invaders when they had descended to the ground again. Their onslaught was so fierce that Cortes in vain tried to halt the frenzied retreat of his men. The Spaniards, hard pressed, turned and made as quickly as they could for the causeway, and breathed deeply only when they were once more outside the city.

Yet Cortes was not deterred from making another attack the day following, and each day after that. Though forced each evening to retreat, he succeeded in burning many buildings on the way, thus clearing the ground for the next ad-

vance, and penetrated each day farther into the city. The Aztecs' fury increased as they saw this destruction of the beautiful palaces of the nobles and of the homes of their citizens, and their fighting grew more violent.

Fernando, who at Cortes's command was directing the soldiers to fire all the houses along the street, suddenly noticed that one of these seemed familiar to him, so he bade the soldiers wait outside a moment while he passed in. When he entered the inner court he found that he had not been mistaken. It was indeed the scene of his captivity, where he had eaten his heart out with distress and self-reproach. He went into the room which he believed had been occupied by Ahuitzotl after he had ended his short service with Cortes. There were evidences all about of a hasty departure. Robes of many kinds, disguises, court costumes and a warrior's cape, lay scattered on the floor. And glittering on the mat Fernando noticed the golden ornament which he himself had worn when he took Ahuitzotl's place as Montezuma's page. He picked this up and put it in his wallet. It was almost with regret that he watched the soldiers set fire to the house. He no longer felt any hatred for it or its master.

Famine was threatening the city. Though Guatemozin had long ago sent away most of the women, children and infirm, the supply of food was not sufficient. Ahuitzotl organized a force of men who each night set out to the mainland in search of provisions. He it was who suggested to Guatemozin a plan of capturing the hated brigantines.

Hidden in the dense growth near the shore, he installed many canoes, and then in command of others, he let himself

be seen by the vessels as if he were attempting to elude their blockade. His ruse was successful: the brigantines chased him into the shallow waters, where the hidden warriors fell upon them, slaughtered the officers and crew and captured one of the vessels.

Discontented with their slow progress, some of the Spaniards besought Cortes to attempt a quicker campaign. Cortes called a council, and it was decided to try to capture by simultaneous attacks from all sides the great market-place which, once taken, might be converted into a fort within the city. But Cortes warned his officers that their most important duty was to keep their communications free, so that if it were found necessary to retreat, they would have no enemy at their back.

Cortes, advancing from his side, had met with the amount of resistance he had expected. The other divisions made faster progress and when a messenger came to inform him that Alderete, one of his lieutenants, had almost reached the market-place, Cortes exclaimed to Fernando:

"I fear he has gone more rapidly than safely, that he has forgot my caution."

His fears were soon confirmed by a shrill whistle.

" 'Tis Guatemozin's signal," cried Fernando. "Señor, the whole city is upon us."

"Retreat, retreat," yelled Cortes, and the bugles sounded his command. But when the Spaniards reached the breach in the dike which Alderete should have closed up before pursuing the Aztecs whom Guatemozin had ordered to fall back and so lead the foe into an ambush, Cortes saw that their plight was worse now than even in the Terrible Night. Pressed on

every side by the Aztecs, row after row of the Spaniards shoved each other into the water in their mad terror to escape.

"Stand here on the brink, Fernando, Diaz, Pedro!" Cortes called to those near him; "hold out your hands and pull out of the water as many as you may. Remember what awful fate awaits all prisoners."

A Cacique soon marked the Spanish leader where he stood, and he called out "Malinche! Malinche!" A canoe dashed up to the spot and its six occupants fell over each other in their eagerness to seize Cortes, with visions of the glory which would be his who should capture the Teule commander. Fernando saw that Cortes was indeed in the gravest danger, that he was already wounded. He struggled towards him; but just then a blow from a javelin sent him to his knee and he was forced to think only of defending his own life. Luckily a young cavalier, Christoval de Olea, sprang to Cortes's aid. He slew one of the Aztecs and cut off the arm of another. One of Olea's comrades was also now in the thick of the fight. Cortes himself had disappeared from sight. A Tlascalan Cacique, catching sight of Malinche's body as it lay on the ground half covered by dead and struggling Aztecs, pulled him up and set him on his feet. Olea had received a mortal wound.

Fernando had killed the Aztec who had attacked him and was free at last. He caught the bridle of Cortes's horse and hurried with it to where he beheld his master, and in spite of Cortes's refusal to desert his men, Fernando and the captain of his guard forced the wounded leader to mount.

"His life is too important to the army," declared the captain, "to be thrown away here."

Fernando went with him, and they fought their way inch by inch, Cortes hitting out with his sword with all the strength that remained to him, until at length they reached Tacuba. Alvarado and Sandoval were not aware what had taken place. They also had almost succeeded in reaching the market-place when they heard the victorious shouts of the Aztecs and realized at once that the other divisions must have met with defeat. Suddenly through an opening in the foe's ranks they behold three round objects rolling on the ground towards them. They saw with horror that they were human heads, and heads of white men.

"Malinche!" cried out the crowd, and Sandoval could scarcely force himself to look closely enough to see that the Aztecs' boast was not the truth.

"Cortes is fallen; Cortes is fallen!" now cried the panic-stricken troops, and Sandoval hurriedly retreating, heard the same cry from the other divisions.

"By all the saints, Alvarado," he called out, "pray that such an awful calamity has not befallen us." Only his duty to his men kept him from spurring his steed to its utmost in search of the truth. At last the remnant of his troops had reached comparative safety and he could urge his faithful Motilla towards the quarters where he knew he would find Cortes if he were alive.

"Cortes!" he exclaimed, tears streaming from his eyes, "blessed be all the hosts of heaven who have saved you to us."

"Son Sandoval," Cortes answered, scarcely less rejoiced, "I had feared never to look upon you again. The heathen devils held up before me the heads of some of your poor com-

rades and called out 'Sandoval' and 'Tonatiuh,' and I knew not if indeed if they might not be telling the terrible truth. And Alvarado, is he too safe? Then indeed I can bear to think of our losses."

Sandoval's excitement seemed to change his usual habits. The man who at other times was so chary of words now talked incessantly, telling everything that had befallen him that morning. "And what do you think, Cortes," he concluded, "is the cause of this day's rout?"

"It is for my sins, son Sandoval," replied Cortes humbly, "and yet not they alone, I believe, have brought this about, but that Alderete failed to carry out the strict command I gave to you all—that the way should be kept safe in case of retreat. His disobedience has wrought a great woe. You, Sandoval, must now take my place. I am too crippled to discharge my duties. You must watch over the safety of the camp. Give special heed to Alvarado. He is a most gallant soldier, I know it well; but I doubt the Mexican hounds may some hour take him at a disadvantage."

"I thank you, Señor, for the trust you have shown in me," Sandoval answered, much affected; and leaving Cortes to Fernando's care, he set off to lose no time in seeing to the safety of the army.

At sunset the Spaniards, looking towards the city which was so near, that they could behold all that took place above the level of the walls, discovered that something unusual was happening.

"What is it, Fernando?" questioned Cortes from his couch

"TAKE AND EAT," HE SAID

when the boy had been drawn by the cries outside to the entrance of the tent. "What do you see?"

"I see a procession, Master, climbing slowly up the terraces of the Great Teocalli. And Guatemozin leads it. It is too far for me to see his features, but I recognize his golden crown glistening; and after him come the priests. 'Tis some great sacrifice, evidently. And . . . oh!" he cried and then was silent.

"What is it, boy?" demanded Cortes, impatient at the sudden silence. "If you will not answer I will rise and see for myself."

Fernando tried to answer, choked and then said:

"I see . . . a long line of naked *white* figures covered with wreaths of flowers, and . . . the priests lay one on the altar . . . and the sun shines on the knife . . . and . . . oh! Master, I can look no longer."

He flung himself down on the ground, and buried his head in the coverings of the couch as if to shut out the sight. But he did not stop his ears, and he heard from the edge of the causeway the taunts the Aztecs yelled across.

"Such shall be the fate of all our enemies," they cried.

Guatemozin believed that the moment was favourable to weaken the foe now in another way. He sent for Ahuitzotl, who had grown so in height and strength that he now appeared a man.

"I have another duty for you, my warrior," said the King. "You have been a fighter on land and on the water, have worn the disguises which allowed you to creep into our enemies'

midst. Now you shall go as my ambassador to speak my words to those Indians who fight with the Teules against us. Take with you the heads of men and their horses that lie yonder in the court; show them to Tlascalans and to Otomies and other tribes. Say to them that by these tokens they can see that the Teules are as vulnerable as we are, and count for them the sacrifices that have been offered in the teocallis. Tell them that these have softened the anger of Huitzilopotchli towards Anahuac, that now he has declared that he will fight for us, and that in eight days we shall drive the white men to the eastern sea."

Ahuitzotl set off on his mission. By nightfall he glided into a camp and opened his horrible bundle before the Indians, and in a low voice told them what Guatemozin had bid him. "Return to your allegiance," he urged those who had once acknowledged Aztec supremacy. "Leave the Teules," he urged the Tlascalans; "fight not for the sake of these invaders, those whose ancestors in the dim past were yours also."

And his words were heeded. The plight of the Spaniards seemed to many of the allies so desperate that their victory was a dream which had vanished, and all the old awe of the Aztec monarchy was reawakening. The Tlascalans now recalled the warnings of Xicotencatl. "He saw far ahead, brothers," they said, "while our eyes were blinded." Each night Caciques and their followers would creep away and hasten towards their homes, and each morning some of those who were left would plan to go that night.

Cortes saw the dwindling of the great host which he had led to Tenochtitlan and did what he could to prevent its growing

still smaller. While some of his officers gave voice to their fears that it was no longer possible to attempt to conquer the Aztecs, he spoke always as if it were a matter of only a few days more, and with his own strong faith he kept alive the weak faith of others.

CHAPTER XXIV

The Last Assault

"TOMORROW," rejoiced the Aztecs, "tomorrow is the day when Huitzilopochtli will deliver the Teules into our hands, according to the prophecy." And the Tlascalans and the other Indians who had withdrawn from Cortes's army said: "Tomorrow we shall see whether the mouths of the Aztec priests spake the truth."

The morrow arrived, yet still the Spaniards encircled Tenochtitlan, cutting off all food from the beleagured city. The hearts of the Aztecs drooped with their disappointment. No miracle had been wrought by the gods to drive the invaders away; and the Tlascalans too, seeing that the Teules were still encamped where they had left them, returned in great numbers, and Cortes forgave them for their desertion. He had just received another reinforcement, a ship had arrived at Vera Cruz, and the governor left there by Cortes had hurried men, and what was even more important, powder to the besieging army.

Cortes was thus equipped for another attack, and he determined that every step forward should be made permanent.

"The spade is now worth more than the sword," he declared as he ordered that the causeway should be strengthened, and every gap and the canals filled in as solidly as the main construction. The houses nearby were to be pulled down for materials and also to clear the space for the workers.

"The water must be converted into dry land," he commanded. "I would it were not needful to do this. I would that I might spare this city—the most beautiful thing in the world—but by my conscience, I see no other way by which we can go forward safely." Then he called to his officers, saying: "Come with me, Señors. Though we are hidalgos and not wont to soil our hands, let us take spades and start the work as an example."

The Spanish soldiers were indeed willing to follow their leader, but the main part of this labor was soon left to the Indian allies. The Aztecs yelled tauntingly at them:

"Go on, the more you destroy the more you will have to build up hereafter. If we conquer you shall build for us; and if your white friends conquer they will make you do as much for them."

Bernal Diaz next day was resting on his spade and joking with his comrades when Cortes strolled by to see how the work was progressing.

" 'Tis a new task for you, Diaz," said Cortes, who had a real fondness for this sturdy Spaniard.

"Aye, Señor Captain," Bernal replied; "it is no doubt well to make the earth firm here or we had better all take to the brigantines. My clothes are scarce dry yet from the wetting they got on our last retreat. But I know an ally which works

harder for us than even these," and he pointed contemptuously to the Indians carrying huge loads of stones on their backs.

"Who may that be, Diaz?" asked Cortes; "perchance our patron saint?"

"I trust that he too is busy, Señor Commander, but I spoke of Famine. Yonder in the city the Aztecs are gnawing roots and eating the foul scum from the lake. The only meat they have is the bodies of our poor men from the sacrifice, and God be praised for the miracle, the white flesh, they say, is so salty that it nourishes them not."

Cortes passed on, pondering on the misery he knew the inhabitants of Tenochtitlan were suffering. Though he was not to be turned aside from his purpose by any obstacle, he had no love of cruelty or unnecessary suffering. He longed to spare both the beautiful city and its people; so once more he sent as messengers three Caciques who had been taken prisoners, to beseech Guatemozin to give up his fruitless efforts.

The priests who were present when the Emperor listened in anger to this message, cried:

"You will not trust his promises, oh Guatemozin! Remember the fate of Montezuma. Better to trust in the promises of our own gods, who have so long watched over the nation. Better, if need be, to give up our lives at once for our country than drag them out in slavery and suffering among the false strangers."

Guatemozin needed no urging to keep to the course his own intrepid spirit had chosen.

"Let no man henceforth who values his life talk of surrender. We can at least die like warriors," he cried.

Cortes too no longer thought of parleying. Each day his troops advanced farther into the city, and each day what they had gained was held. The Aztecs contested their way bitterly, and many a Spaniard who became separated from his fellows was overcome and dragged away.

Sometimes there were individual contests in which the combatants were so evenly matched that Spaniards and Aztecs stopped their general fighting in order to watch the outcome. One day a young Cacique sprang up on an azotea and, facing the Spanish lines, shook a sword and a shield which he had taken from the Teule he had killed.

"Is there not one amongst you," he cried out tauntingly, "who will fight with me?"

Fernando heard him and besought Cortes:

"Master, let me take up his challenge for the honour of Castile and for mine own honour."

"Are you so greedy?" queried Cortes affectionately. "I thought you had shown already often enough that you are no coward."

"But this once more, Master," pleaded Fernando, and Cortes gave his consent.

Fernando called out in Aztec: "I come, boaster," and climbed up to the flat roof. The Cacique was older and stronger than Fernando, and had he fought with weapons to which he was accustomed, the result would have been different. His first blow wounded Fernando on the temple, and the Aztecs cried out in delight as they saw the blood flow, and the Spaniards looked on, wondering if Cortes had not been unwise in allowing the youth to run such danger. When the

Cacique's sword descended for the second time Fernando caught the point on his shield, and with a swordplay that had been taught him by the best Spanish swordsmen, he made a feint of retreating, and catching his opponent off his guard, lunged at him and ran his blade through his body.

He picked up the weapons as they fell from the hands of his dying adversary, and leaping down, laid them at Cortes's feet.

Cortes put his hand on the boy's shoulder, saying:

"Fernando, you have again proved yourself a man. Why then should I tarry longer to bestow knighthood upon you?"

He then drew his own blade from the scabbard and struck Fernando on the shoulder with it, saying: "I dub you knight, Don Fernando de Casteñeda."

The boy could not speak for joy and received in glad silence the congratulations of all the officers and many of the men.

Marina waited until Fernando was alone, just entering the tent he still shared with Cortes.

"You are now a real Cacique, Fernando," she said smiling, speaking, as she always did to him, in Aztec. "I wish your mother could have lived to see you today. But I could not let you think that there was no woman to be proud of you and your deeds."

"Thank you, Marina," the young knight answered; "I have always been mindful of your praise."

"It is nearly over," and Marina pointed to the city. "The gods—nay, Christ—be praised! My heart aches to think of the anguish there, of the empty mouths, the weak bodies, and their terror. Be good to them when they are conquered, little

Cacique," she pleaded, laying her hand on his arm. "They are my people, and you Spaniards too are now my people."

"I will remember, Marina," he answered, "if for no other reason than because you ask it, who have been so good to me."

That night Cortes, as if to mark his new dignity, ordered Fernando to stand watch at the edge of the causeway. The new knight walked up and down some feet in advance of his men who were dozing as they lay, muskets on their knees. He was thinking over the strange adventures that had been his since he landed, almost a child, at Vera Cruz, when he heard his name called from in front of him.

"Fernando, it is I, Ahuitzotl," he heard, and he stood still and saw the dim lines of the other's figure on a wall a few yards off.

"I too am on guard," explained Ahuitzotl; "and I am glad that we may meet thus once more. I saw today how Malinche made you a warrior, even as my lord, King Guatemozin, has made me one; for we too have ceremonies to mark the day when a youth is admitted to military rank."

Fernando answered: "I am glad to know that all is well with you, Ahuitzotl. It may be that the day will come when I can befriend you, or," he added out of a chivalrous feeling that would not allow him to hurt the other by taking victory for granted, "that you can befriend me. We do no wrong to our loyalties by not hating each other."

The clouds lightened just then and the moon shone full upon the Aztec's face.

"Oh, but you are thin," exclaimed Fernando. "Is it from hunger?"

Ahuitzotl's pride kept him silent. Fernando stooped and picked up a basket which contained the food intended for his morning meal and raised it on the point of his spear to the wall. "Take and eat," he said; "we have often eaten together at Montezuma's table. Refuse not now to be my guest."

Ahuitzotl did not refuse, but ate greedily the first real food he had had in weeks. He would not tell of the terrible straits to which all those in Tenochtitlan had been driven, but Fernando did not need words to inform him. Then they separated, but all night each could hear the other's footsteps as he guarded his post.

Famine and disease, due to the crowding of the inhabitants into the small space left them by their foe, was weakening the strength of Guatemozin's army. He saw the heroic struggle his people were making, the women as well as the men. They helped not only to dress the wounds and carry earth and stones to build or repair barricades; but many, taking up the arms of warriors who had fallen, fought fiercely and doggedly in the sorties by which Guatemozin worried the Spaniards.

Yet the Aztec Emperor was losing hope. He knew that no one could do more than he was doing; that no ancestor of his, of whose conquests he had been so proud, had ever seen such forces arrayed against him. His hope came and went; his courage never left him.

Cortes, he learned from Ahuitzotl's observation, was preparing another chief attack in order to join his forces to Alvarado's, from which they had been separated for many weeks. The canal was between them, and when this had been filled up Cortes was able to march across and to the market-place,

where he and Alvarado greeted each other affectionately. Now together they held a large portion of the city, that is, what remained, fire-swept ruins of palaces, homes and fair gardens. In vain the Aztecs disputed their passage through the great square; they were forced to retreat to the northwest corner of the city, which they had barricaded.

Cortes, knowing that his foe could not escape by land or water and eager to end the terrible suffering, sent to Guatemozin asking him to meet him, that they might discuss terms. He was told that the Aztec Emperor would be at an appointed spot the following day; but when attended by Fernando and other officers, he went thither, Guatemozin failed to appear.

Now Cortes determined to strike his last blow. The Indian allies were summoned from the outskirts of the city and, together with the Spaniards, they advanced on the Aztec quarter. The besieged knew that they had no place to retreat if they would, and they fought with the desperation of trapped beasts. The women rained down stones almost as rapidly as the men shot their arrows.

"Let no one harm a woman or child," Cortes commanded, and the Spaniards obeyed his orders faithfully; but the Tlascalans, now that the chance had at last come to smite their ancient enemies, spared no one.

"Never did I see so pitiless a race," Cortes remarked to Fernando, "or any thing wearing the form of man so destitute of humanity."

The dead lay in mounds about him; his ears were deafened with the sounds of battle and the piteous cries of the women and the wounded. He commanded the slaughter to stop.

"For the night may bring them wisdom," he said, "and they may ask for peace."

But in the morning, though he sent another messenger to Guatemozin, it was without success. The answer was:

"Guatemozin is ready to die where he is, but he will not listen to you. It is for you to work your pleasure."

"Then," said Cortes, through Fernando, "go and prepare your countrymen for death. Their hour is come."

Weakened by fasting until they could scarcely bend their bows, yet brave as when the fame of an Aztec warrior made other nations tremble, the remnant of Guatemozin's army awaited the last attack of the Spaniards. The guns began it and the feebled reply of arrows was in vain. There was no stopping the Spaniards now; neither bravery nor endurance nor trust in the gods was any use. Only the lake offered a choice of deaths, and thousands sprang into the waters until their bodies piled up level with the walls.

The Aztecs had at last been conquered.

CHAPTER XXV

Victory!

BEFORE the dawn of the final assault of the Spaniards, King Guatemozin left the narrow courtyard which served him now for royal apartments, banquet-hall and council-chamber, and walked to the lake alone. It was still dark. A dim glow from the part of the city held by the Spaniards sufficed for him to make the investigation for which he had come. Even when he leaned over, his long lance did not touch the bottom of the lake, and the waters there, owing perhaps to some subterranean springs, were clean and free from debris. As he turned to retrace his steps he saw Ahuitzotl approaching him. The young warrior saluted with all the reverence he had been wont to show to Montezuma in the height of his power, and waited motionless until it should please his sovereign to address him.

"What do you seek?" asked the Emperor at length.

"You, oh King," he answered.

"And what message have you for me then?" Guatemozin spoke almost impatiently. It was an effort to bring back his

thoughts from the path they had travelled for hours, ever since he knew that there was no longer hope.

"May I speak freely, oh Guatemozin?" asked Ahuitzotl.

"As comrade to comrade, Ahuitzotl," he replied.

"Then, my master, you know that it is over, our long struggle here to free the city. The gods have not kept their promises to aid us, or perchance the priests did not understand their sayings. When the sun rises the Teules will take what is left of Tenochtitlan. There is naught more that your valor can do."

"I can die, Ahuitzotl, die with the last of my people. Harken to the plan my spirit has made for us. We will await the Spaniards' advance, then we will fight fiercely, retreating to this spot; and when there is not another arrow left or arm strong enough to shoot it, I will spring here into the waters by the side of which my ancestors rested, to lead the way for my people to escape the Teules."

"That were indeed a death worthy of your blood, oh King, if all your subjects were here in Tenochtitlan and could perish with you."

"What is the meaning of your thought?" Guatemozin asked when Ahuitzotl paused.

"May it please you to give ear to what your servant now lays before you. If you were once out of the city and on the mainland, though you stood alone, before the sun had set there would flock to you a host of faithful warriors. From nearby towns they would come, where the might of the Teules has overawed them, once they knew that their Emperor was in their midst. And runners would hasten by every road, to hill and plain, to all parts of thy kingdom, calling out, 'Up!

Guatemozin calls you. Tenochtitlan is indeed lost, but Anahuac has yet other fair towns.' And then, oh my Lord, when you have once more an army at your back, not starving wretches, you know that you could beleaguer the Teules here as they have beleaguered us; only, we would not let them escape."

He stopped to see what impression his words had made on his sovereign. Guatemozin was silent for many moments.

"And if I could escape, how could I leave my poor people here to perish?" he asked.

"Perchance by going you might save even their lives if you could bring them succor speedily. Moreover, my Lord, have not your people outside the walls of Tenochtitlan also a claim on you? By going you may restore the power of Anahuac; by staying all will perish."

Once more Guatemozin stood lost in thought. Then he said:

"I will listen to you, Ahuitzotl. I know that you had not sought to persuade me if you had not already prepared a plan for escape. All that I ask is that Tecuichpo shall accompany me."

"Let us hasten, oh King," Ahuitzotl begged. "The canoes are ready awaiting you, and it would be well if you would command the soldiers to fight as long as they may when the Teules attack in the morning, that the foe may think you are still here."

"It needs not my command to bid my people defend their city to the last," said Guatemozin both proudly and sadly.

. . . . . .

The dawn had come and the trumpets of the Spaniards had

blown for the last attack. The brigantines were active as the forces on shore, firing on the causeway and on the war canoes which swarmed about them. Sandoval noted that some of the canoes were not stopping to fight but, taking advantage of the confusion and the smoke, were hastening towards the opposite side of the lake. He gave orders that they should be overhauled and stopped.

"Bid Holguin, who boasts that his brigantine can outsail all the others, hasten and bring them back. Who knows that they may not be trying to carry off the treasure."

Holguin set out after the three large canoes, which were keeping together and had already neared the other shore. The occupants of the canoes when they saw that they were being pursued and that the wind was in favor of their enemies, rowed more swiftly than ever canoe had been rowed before on the lake.

"We are gaining," one of the Spanish soldier-sailors cried, excitedly rejoicing in the sport of the chase; "perchance we shall capture the treasure and have the first choice of gold and jewels."

They were now so close that Holguin could tell that the foremost canoe held, beside the rowers, twenty men and two women.

"It may be," he said to himself, "that yonder is a greater treasure for Cortes than gold or jewels."

They were now within bowshot, and he shouted to his men:

"Bend your crossbows on the canoe. It must not escape us."

In a few more strokes the boat would have touched the shore,

yet not so quickly but that an arrow could reach it before it beached. The rowers stayed their stroke, and cried out:

"Shoot not! shoot not! our Lord is here!"

Guatemozin had sprung to his feet, shield in hand and maquahuitl in the other, and stood where he could cover Tecuichpo. And Ahuitzotl and the other Caciques held their shields before them both.

Holguin, whose guess was now confirmed, bade his men lower their weapons.

"I am Guatemozin," called out the Aztec King. "Lead me to Malinche. I am his prisoner; but let no harm come to my wife and my followers."

"Since you are taken, King Guatemozin," said his Spanish captor, after he had helped him and the Caciques on to the deck of the brigantine, "will you not call out to your people to cease fighting?"

"There is no need," answered Guatemozin, turning his head away; "they will fight no longer when they see that their prince is a prisoner."

Saddest perhaps of all the melancholy Aztecs was Ahuitzotl. He knew how near they had been to safety. If only the God of the Winds had not blown and filled the sails of the Teules they had not been overtaken. "Perchance," he said to Tecuichpo, "these white strangers are his chosen after all, the children of Quetzalcoatl." He saw with despair how the news of the Emperor's capture was spreading all over the lake, as a ripple made by a stone touches another ripple in ever-widening circles. He could hear the cries of sorrow as the Aztecs threw down their useless weapons, and the wails of lament

from the shore. He was sunk in such dejection that, like his master, he did not notice Sandoval's arrival on board to claim the royal prisoner as his own, nor hear Holguin's refusal to give him up.

Fernando had heard a rumor that something of great importance was happening on the lake. He rushed to the waterfront and beheld the brigantine tacking slowly back towards the city, and from the canoes came the wailing voices which told him that Guatemozin was taken. Fernando hurried back to Cortes with the news.

"Hasten to the shore, Fernando," Cortes commanded, "and, as you love me, see that our fallen foe receives all courtesy. And on your way bid Marina come quickly to interpret between us."

Then Cortes ordered preparation made for Guatemozin's reception, a carpet for the royal feet and a table covered with food.

As Guatemozin stepped ashore he roused himself to his accustomed dignity. He walked as firmly between the guard of Spaniards sent to escort him as if it were his own bodyguard. Behind him at a little distance followed the Caciques, among them Ahuitzotl.

Cortes had never seen the Aztec Emperor nearby, but there was no need of royal banners or crowns, which had been laid aside before the attempt to escape, to distinguish the monarch. The Conqueror stepped forward and bowed low and courteously to his captive. Guatemozin spoke quickly:

"I have done all I could to defend myself and my people. I am now reduced to this state. You will do with me, Ma-

linche, as you will. Better despatch me with this," and he placed his hand on Cortes's dagger, "and rid me of life at once."

"Fear not," replied Cortes gently, "you shall be treated with all honour. You have defended your capital like a brave warrior. A Spaniard knows how to respect valour even in an enemy."

He looked about him and then asked:

"Where is the Princess Tecuichpo? She has naught to fear from us." When he learned that she was still on board of the brigantine he sent an escort to bring her to her husband, and on her arrival he showed her such courtesy as he would have shown to a Spanish princess, remembering that she was the daughter of Montezuma, who had been his friend, and whom he had promised to care for her.

"Eat," he besought them all, "eat in token that our strife is ended."

When they had finished Cortes gave commands to all his officers to withdraw from the city before the night had fallen, away from the pestilential air of Tenochtitlan heaped up with its dead.

Ahuitzotl marched beside his master that he might lean on him if he were weary, but Guatemozin would accept of no support. As he passed out of the city on to the causeway he looked back at Tenochtitlan.

"I would you had let me die, Ahuitzotl," he said in a low voice. "Yet I thank you too for your effort. It was the gods who willed otherwise—the gods who gave my fate into the hands of the Teules."

"But, Master, they will do you no harm," comforted Ahuitzotl as best he could. "Behold how Malinche has treated you."

"The end is not yet," answered Guatemozin, and then was silent. What he felt, what the leader of a conquered people feels, was not for him to share, even with those he trusted most. The darkness fell over the city and the lake, yet the sun would rise again and Tenochtitlan would be rebuilt; but the darkness in the heart of Guatemozin would know no sunrise.

That night Fernando sought Ahuitzotl as he lay on the ground outside the tent set aside for Guatemozin, and found him still awake.

"Ahuitzotl," he said, seating himself beside him, "I come not to pry into your sorrows. Were I not a Spaniard I could sorrow with you for all you have lost. I come only to offer to you raiment or covering if you are in need, also my friendship."

The Aztec warrior had started up, ready to resent any boasting or rejoicing at his defeat. It was only gradually that the impression of the young knight's gentle pity reached his brain. Then he answered:

"I thank you, Teule. You whom I have seen fight like the wildcat are also soft as the dove. Your words soothe the pain in my heart. I have no need of raiment, but your friendship I will accept as a token, if in my misery I should forget, that I have proved myself also a brave warrior. Otherwise you would not offer it to me."

"Let us talk not of the past," said Fernando, "but of the

future. The Spaniards and the Aztecs must needs become friends, and you and I, Ahuitzotl, who understand each other, can be of help to both our peoples."

A few moments later the two young warriors saluted each other gravely, Ahuitzotl in the Aztec manner, and Fernando doffing his cap.

"Goodnight, friend," said the Spaniard.

"Long life to you, friend," answered the Aztec.

On the following day Cortes granted Guatemozin's request that his people might leave the ruined city for the mainland. It was a sad and dreary procession of emaciated men and women. After it had passed Cortes turned to Sandoval and said:

"They were a brave foe, and now let us put our minds on making them a happy race again. Oh, Son Sandoval," he added joyously, "now we will celebrate our victory. Tell me, you who come from mine own native town, is it in truth Hernando Cortes of Medelein that has achieved this wondrous conquest? Is my name to be numbered with those of Cæsar and Alexander and Charlemagne? Think, Sandoval, of all the difficulties we have overcome, the nights in armour, the fighting, the fasting, the wounds and the despair of the Terrible Night! And now we have given an empire to Spain; we have conquered these heathen that they may be baptized and saved from Hell. Think, Sandoval," he continued, laying his hand on his lieutenant's arm, "when we set foot in Spain they will say 'here come the Conquerors of the Indies.' "

Sandoval had no need to answer. It was enough that Cortes felt his sympathy.

"I am like a boy, Sandoval," he went on. "I have reached the top of the hill that was such hard climbing and I must shout for joy, and others must shout with me. Tomorrow we will celebrate with a banquet such as we have never seen before. There will be no need to bid everyone be gay. Even you, silent one, must make a speech, will you not?'

"Aye," laughed Sandoval, "I will make one. I will say that never men had such a leader as ours."

Cortes's joy was too great to be kept within bounds. But there was nothing selfish in his grasping out eagerly towards the fame he had won. All day long he talked to his officers and men, calling out to them as they passed him: "Hey! Pedro! the wound you gained at Otumba aches no longer now?"—"Carlo, I have not forgotten how you pitched that idol down the teocalli steps!" His memory had kept them all—the deeds of individual bravery and patient endurance. He recalled them now and his praise brought brightness into stern eyes.

To Alvarado, Sandoval, de Ordaz and others of his lieutenants he gave his thanks for their loyalty. He sent for the leaders of the Tlascalans, and other Indian allies, thanked them in his own name and in that of Emperor Charles, and promised them rewards for themselves and for their people.

When Marina had finished translating his words and the soldiers had departed, Cortes turned to her, smiling:

"And what can I say to you, Oh! you faithful one? What words or what jewels could repay Marina for the service she has rendered us?"

"Seek for no rewards for me, Malinche," answered the girl. "I am content that I have brought to my people those who will destroy the terrible altars of the gods and will teach them a new faith and new, gentler ways."

At that moment Fernando came out of the tent in front of which Cortes and Marina were standing. He was on his way to consult with Bernal Diaz about sending a force of soldiers for fresh provisions.

"Be not in such haste," cried Cortes. "I am bestowing largesses today of words and praise, since I must wait a little before I have gold wherewith to pay my gratitude, and to you, boy, I owe a large measure."

"No, Master," interrupted Fernando, "you owe me nothing. 'Tis I who can never pay you. You made me your page that day on the *capitana;* you taught me all I know of soldiering; you let me serve you, let me take part in this great expedition; you made me a knight—and you would thank me!"

"Well, boy!" assented Cortes, laying his hand affectionately on Fernando's shoulder. "Let us talk then no more of payments."

The banquet that evening was as gay as Cortes wished. Food of all kinds was now abundant, and officers and men, while they ate, talked of battles and skirmishes in which they had taken part; showed the booty they had collected, and sang songs in praise of Cortes. Father Olmedo remonstrated the next day to Cortes, saying:

"Will you then forget in your carousals that you owe the victory to heaven and will you not render due thanks for it?"

"I had not forgotten, Father," Cortes replied. "We will appoint tomorrow for the celebration."

The next day, led by the stained and torn banners of Castile and of Cortes, the entire army marched, singing the litany. Then Father Olmedo preached to them, and mass was celebrated, Cortes kneeling and thanking God and the Saints humbly for their aid in his great victory.

FINIS

CENTRAL CIRCULATION
CHILDREN'S ROOM